kidscreen®

engaging the global children's entertainment industry

Q1 2025

A PUBLICATION OF BRUNICO COMMUNICATIONS LTD.
CANADA POST AGREEMENT NUMBER 40050265 | PRINTED IN CANADA USPS AFSM 100
Approved Polywrap | US$795 in the U.S. CA$895 in Canada US$995 outside of Canada & the U.S.

26 x 7 mins
for 4–6 years

NELLY JELLY

Sometimes you just need a LITTLE help from your friends

kidscreen Summit · ANNECY FESTIVAL · LONDON BRAND LICENSING EUROPE · mipjunior · mipcom CANNES

SCHEDULE THE MEETING:

Simona Krasauskiene
simona@nellyjellyworld.com

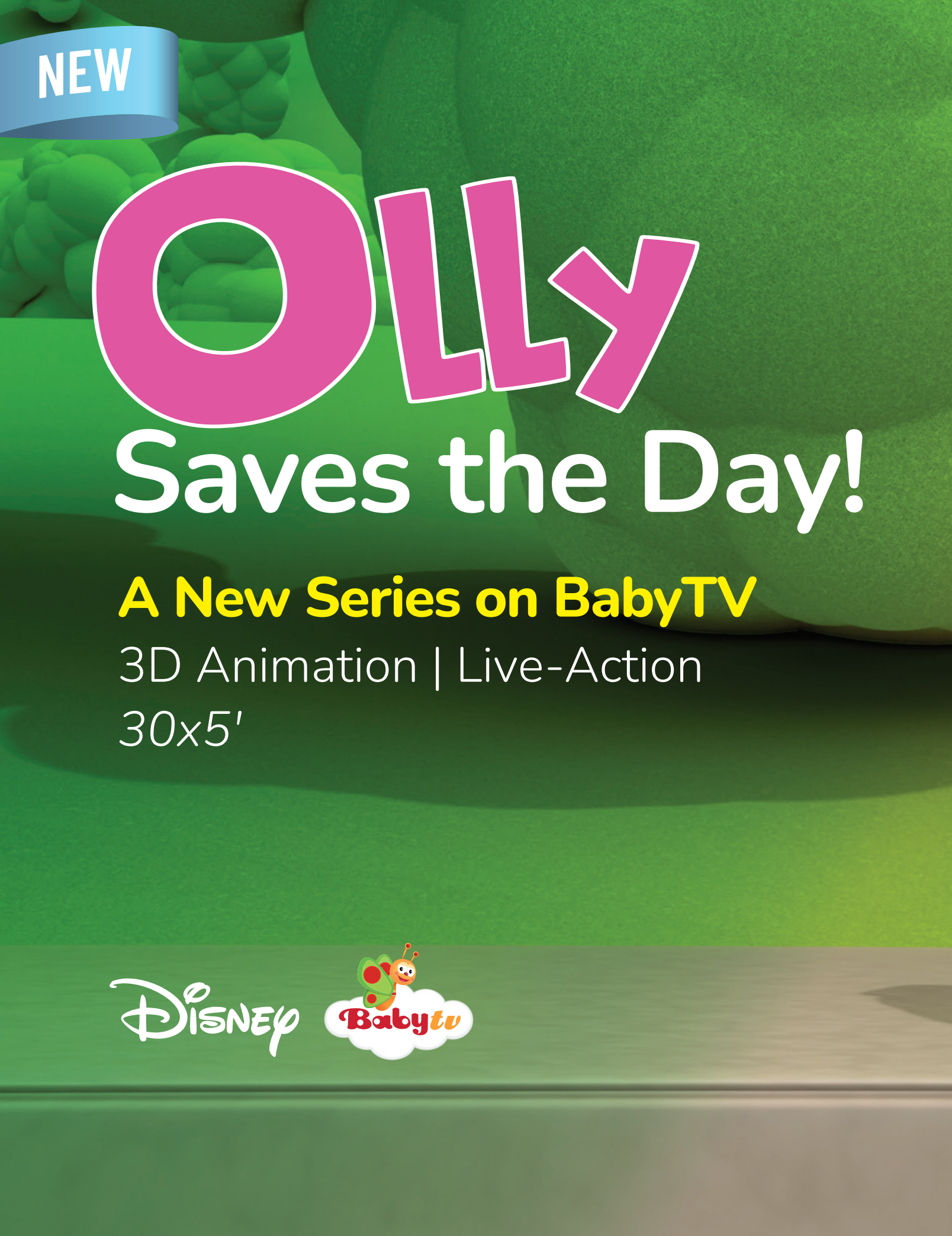
Martin Lowde
martin@3megos.com

kidscreen®
engaging the global children's entertainment industry
Q1 2025

EYES WIDE OPEN

Facing a challenging future with grit and heart

The path to net zero + Meme-fueled marketing


NEW
Olly
Saves the Day!
A New Series on BabyTV
3D Animation | Live-Action
30x5'
Disney
Babytv

babytv.com | sales@babytvchannel.com

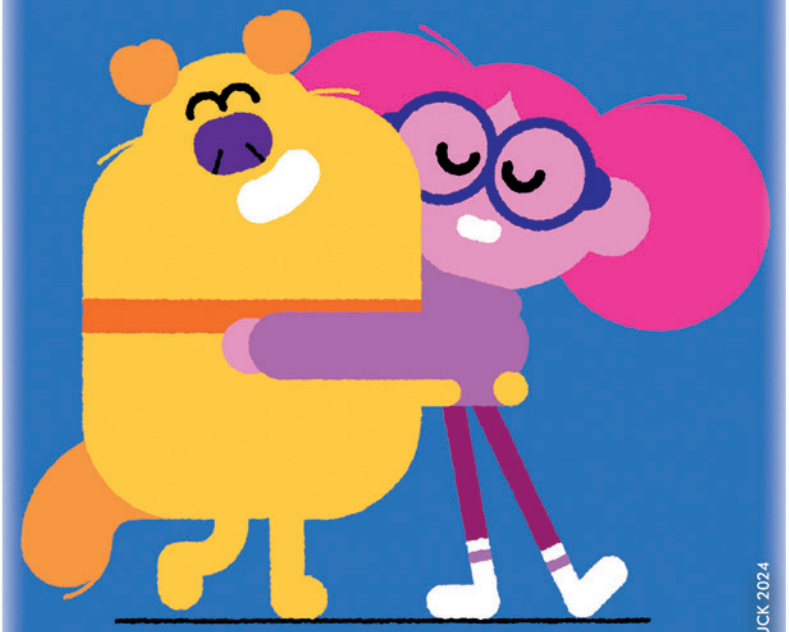
Mediawan KIDS & FAMILY

THE LEADING DISTRIBUTOR OF FAMILY CONTENT FAVORITES

Turnip + Duck

Maddie + Triggs

52X7′



© TURNIP + DUCK 2024

METHOD ANIMATION
Mediawan

THE 3 MUSKETEERS

52X13′

© 2024 - METHOD ANIMATION - PALOMAR - ZDF - ZDF STUDIOS

MEET US AT KIDSCREEN SUMMIT

MEDIAWANKIDSANDFAMILY.COM

© 2025 DreamWorks Animation LLC. All Rights Reserved.

NBCUniversal
GLOBAL TV DISTRIBUTION
KIDS & FAMILY

CONTENTS

kidscreen
Q1 2025

22 **MOVES**
Copernicus is betting on a bespoke video game to build an audience for *Lana Longbeard*.

32 **SCREEN**
How kids entertainment brands are embracing meme culture to attract audiences through humor.

50 **CONSUMER PRODUCTS**
Mattel and The LEGO Group are helping to turbo-charge Formula 1's bid to reach a younger fanbase.

58 **KID INSIGHT**
Sesame Workshop checks back in with US parents on the power of kindness.

60 **TECH**
Why powerhouse brands like Hello Kitty and Miraculous are jumping into open-world game *PK XD*.

26 New funding and commission requirements are driving kids content producers to ramp up sustainability efforts and reduce their carbon footprints.

64 The difference AI is already making for kids production companies.

68 Co-production treaties and their unique power to unlock financing.

72 Why mission-based content for kids makes good business sense.

OUR SOLD COVER sports an ad for OAK9 Entertainment's *Stomp! Stomp! Rhinos!* (distributed by Boat Rocker Media), while our editorial cover features Hidden Pigeon Company's new series *Cat the Cat Tries That!*.

BRAND NEW!
THE LATEST SEASON OF THE BELOVED CHILDREN'S SHOW IS NOW AVAILABLE!
The Wiggles
READY, STEADY, WIGGLE!
SEASON 7 • 26 X 15'
THE WIGGLES
CONNECT WITH THE WIGGLES

2025 KIDSCREEN AWARDS NOMINEE: BEST MIXED MEDIA (PRE-SCHOOL) CATEGORY
Beep + Mort
THE ACTION-PACKED ADVENTURES OF TWO BEST FRIENDS
SEASONS 1 & 2
40 X 15'
ABC Kids
WINDMILL PICTURES
2025 KIDSCREEN Awards

ABC COMMERCIAL
Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Contact: info@contentsales.abc.net.au
Website: abc.net.au/contentsales

Discover the Magic Behind Insert Coin Animation Studios

Tucked away in the vibrant heart of Colombia, **Insert Coin Animation Studios** isn't just another creative space—it's where talent thrives, where innovation is powered by passion, and where **people always come first**. For us, creating world-class children's animation isn't just about cutting-edge technology—it's about nurturing a team that feels empowered, respected, and inspired.

A Studio Built on Values

At **Insert Coin** , our secret to success isn't just in the work we produce—it's in **the culture we've built**. Our values aren't just buzzwords—they're the heartbeat of our studio. They guide our decisions, collaborations and every animation we create.

As CEO and founder **Camilo Escárraga** puts it, "Our values shape who we are as a studio. When our team feels respected, supported, and has room to grow and express themselves **magic happens**. It's not just about the work —it's about creating a workplace where people can thrive, both personally and professionally."

Camilo's message is simple: **People are the foundation of everything we do**. If we want our studio—and our industry—to succeed, we need to prioritise the people behind the work. When employees feel valued, they bring their best to every project, sparking innovation and creativity.

Why People-First Cultures Lead to Success

When we take care of our team, they take care of everything else. A **happy, motivated team** leads to **better results**. It's simple: a culture of trust, respect and care doesn't just make a studio a great place to work—it's the key to **consistent innovation** and **world-class animation**. We prioritise the well-being and development of every single member of the team, because we know that when people feel supported they thrive.

At Insert Coin, we invest in our people, so they can grow both as artists and as humans. That growth goes beyond just technical skills—it includes creativity, leadership, languages, mental health support, financial literacy and more.

When our team members have the **tools to grow personally and professionally**, they bring their best selves to every project. We think it's essential that our team have a real life—one where they can live a fulfilling, balanced life in a collaborative and supportive environment.

For studios looking to grow and innovate, aligning core values with the people who carry them out is essential. When values resonate with the founder and team, it fosters **loyalty** and **passion** fueling **creativity** making every project unforgettable. Studios that invest in their people build stronger, more sustainable success, where every project for every client becomes a testament to shared vision and commitment.

Camilo Escárraga

How Can We All Do Better?

We're proud of the culture we've created at Insert Coin, but we know the journey doesn't stop here. **The entire industry needs to evolve**—and we're challenging others to think about their workplace culture, too.

Are you empowering your people? Are you listening to their needs? Are you providing them with the support and opportunities to grow and be their best?

It's time we all ask ourselves: **What can we do better?** A thriving studio isn't just about talent—it's about investing in the well-being and development of the people who make it all happen. Let's lead by example and create environments where everyone can succeed.

Insert Coin Team

Insert Coin Team

Take a Peek Behind the Scenes

If you watch any project we've created, you'll feel the passion, precision and care that everyone involved brings to the table. These qualities are at the heart of our values and reflect who we are.

Curious to see how our values come to life in action? Explore our "Making of" video for a behind the scenes look at the dedication behind every project.

Let's Build a Better Industry

At Insert Coin, we believe in **creativity with heart**. Together, we can redefine what success in the animation industry looks like—and it starts with the people.

Our vision is simple: when we prioritise the well-being and growth of the people behind the work, there are no limits to what we can achieve. This is who we are —stronger, more united, and more committed than ever to building a better, more sustainable future for our industry.

Meet us at **Kidscreen Summit 2025** to connect with us in person and discover how we're blending creativity, innovation and a people first approach. We're excited to chat, collaborate and explore how we can shape the future of animation together. For more insights, you can visit our website **www.insertcoin.com.co**

Together, we can build an extraordinary animation industry.

Common ground

Here I go again. That's the thought that crossed my mind when *Kidscreen*'s senior reporter Ryan Tuchow told me about conversations he'd been a part of at Cartoon Forum concerning how the industry planned to reduce its carbon footprint and do its bit to limit the production of greenhouse gases and fight global warming.

This was very familiar ground to me, even if it was ground I was surprised to be revisiting.

One of the roles I held prior to joining *Kidscreen* was as an editor for a mining magazine. At the time, the mining industry was just beginning to take its first significant steps towards reducing its carbon footprint and moving towards electrification. Because of the nature of that industry, there was a great deal of skepticism about the goals and outcomes of the endeavor.

Oil sands companies and producers of thermal coal (the type that's burned by utility companies to power electricity generators) didn't want to see their products phased out. But more than that, mining companies and their equipment suppliers had to figure out how to keep people safe and production flowing, all while working in some of the harshest and most dangerous conditions in the world—from freezing winter temperatures in the Arctic, to blazing-hot deserts in the summer—not to mention running ventilation systems that allow miners to breathe while working miles underground. Keep in mind that mining is the heaviest of heavy industries, having to handle, process and move tons of rock and ore everyday.

As a magazine, we reported on some of the first wide-scale adoption of massive electric mining trucks. We explored the difficulties of reducing emissions while flying into and out of isolated communities or exploring untouched wildernesses. We covered the dangers of EV batteries catching fire, triggering thermal runaways, and the challenges of containing and fighting those kinds of fires while underground. We told stories about adopting carbon tracking methodologies and applying them to every part of the supply chain, measuring Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions. We even introduced a new section in the magazine devoted to the net-zero movement.

Now it's the entertainment industry's turn to head down this same path towards reducing its own greenhouse gas output. And Ryan's "Nothing but net zero" story on page 26 takes a deep and comprehensive look at efforts being made around the world to do exactly that, as well as exploring what it all means for producers, studios and broadcasters.

As hard as this journey will be—and I know from past experience that it won't be easy—it's a necessary one that's not only supported by science, but by the world's religions, which all talk, in their own ways, about being good stewards of the earth. It's about ensuring that the children we all work so hard to entertain will have a livable world in the future and a clean and stable environment. Put simply, it's the very least we can do, so let's get started.

—Carolyn Gruske

kidscreen

Q1 2025 • VOLUME 29 • ISSUE 1

SVP & PUBLISHER
Jocelyn Christie jchristie@brunico.com

EDITORIAL
EDITOR
Carolyn Gruske cgruske@brunico.com
ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Janet Lees jlees@brunico.com
SENIOR REPORTER
Ryan Tuchow rtuchow@brunico.com
STAFF WRITERS
Sadhana Bharanidharan sbharanidharan@brunico.com
Cole Watson cwatson@brunico.com
CONTRIBUTORS
Circana, Brendan Christie, Jill Crane, Jeremy Dickson, Kim Foulds, Emily Horgan

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & ADVERTISING SALES
(416) 408-2300 or 1-800-KID-4512
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
Maggie Wilkins-Hobbs mwilkins@brunico.com
ACCOUNT MANAGER
Negin Davood ndavood@brunico.com

CREATIVE
CREATIVE MANAGER & ART DIRECTOR
Taylee Buttigieg tbuttigieg@brunico.com

AUDIENCE SERVICES
DATA INTEGRITY & CUSTOMER SUPPORT SUPERVISOR
Christine McNalley kidscreencustomercare@brunico.com

CORPORATE
PRESIDENT & CEO
Russell Goldstein rgoldstein@brunico.com
EVP, CANADIAN MEDIA BRANDS & EDITORIAL DIRECTOR
Mary Maddever mmaddever@brunico.com
SVP & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATPE GLOBAL
Claire Macdonald cmacdonald@brunico.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS
To order, visit www.kidscreen.com/subscribe. To make a change to an existing subscription, please contact us by email (support.kidscreen.com). Fax: 416.408.0249 Tel: 416.408.2448.

Kidscreen is published five times per year by Brunico Communications Ltd. Subscription rates in the US are US$89 for one year and US$159 for two years, and single copies are US$7.95. Please allow four weeks for new subscriptions and address changes.

REPUBLISHING & SUBMISSIONS
Nothing in *Kidscreen* may be reproduced in whole or in part without the written permission of the Publisher. All letters sent to *Kidscreen* or its editorial team are assumed to be intended for publication. *Kidscreen* invites editorial comment, but accepts no responsibility for its loss, damage or destruction, howsoever arising, while in its office or in transit. All material to be returned must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

POSTMASTER NOTIFICATION
US Postmaster: Send address changes to *Kidscreen*, PO Box 1103, Niagara Falls, NY, 14304. Canadian Postmaster: Send undeliverables and address changes to *Kidscreen*, 8799 Highway 89, Alliston, ON, L9R 1V1. Canada Post Publication Agreement number 40050265 (printed in Canada)

ISSN number 1205-7746 - ©Brunico Communications Ltd. (2025)
Kidscreen® is a registered trademark of Brunico Communications Ltd.

Watch for our next issue!
Street Date: May 5

KiDoodle.tv™

The **FREE**
Safe Streaming™
Service for Kids

amazon fire tv android iOS tv chromecast Hisense
LG Roku SAMSUNG SHARP VEWD VIZIO VIDAA xfinity X1

Kidoodle.TV® is owned and operated by **A Parent Media Co. Inc.**

For licensing contact **content@kidoodle.tv**

www.kidoodle.tv

THE LIST

10 things on our radar this month

1 Trouble on the Street

With its 55th season recently released, the future of kids TV staple *Sesame Street* has become rather unclear. In December, Warner Bros. Discovery's HBO and Max opted not to renew a decade-long output deal that expires this year, so producer Sesame Workshop has started the search for a new critical distribution partner to keep the show running. Max said its decision to back away from its longstanding *Sesame Street* deal stems from a content strategy shift away from pure children's fare to all-family and adult programming. It's discouraging news, to say the least, for a kids TV market that's already on shaky ground due to budget cutbacks and a commissioning downturn. But for its part, the Workshop has been busy refreshing and tweaking the show's format (starting with the upcoming 56th season) to better connect with today's preschoolers. These changes include more character development and narrative-driven storytelling built around two 11-minute stories instead of the show's signature magazine-style format. A leadership shift is also underway, with IMAX and HBO alum Joseph Giraldi joining as COO this month to help CEO Sherrie Westin (who was promoted into her role in July) start a new chapter at the company.

6

Hello, Beta!

The world welcomes a new demographic this year with the advent of Gen Beta (those born between 2025 and 2039). Keep an eye on the cultural trends and values that will shape this key cohort in the years to come, from Gen-Z parenting styles, to growing up in a post-AI world.

7

Must be 16 or older

The Australian government has passed a social media ban that will prevent kids under age 16 from setting up accounts on Facebook and TikTok. And other countries are following suit, with France, Singapore and Canada all considering how similar bans could protect their young citizens from online harm and bullying.

2 YouTube drives TV time

In a year-end recap, YouTube revealed that global viewers streamed more than a billion hours of YouTube content daily on their TV screens in 2024—and kids content stood out as a top-performing category, driven in part by Ms. Rachel. Ironically, thanks to YouTube, the answer to the question of where kids are watching TV these days could increasingly be on TVs.

3 Fresh starts in France

Last year, two significant but economically beleaguered French animation studios—TeamTO and Cyber Group Studios—became insolvent. RIVA Studios bought TeamTO in December, and four bidders have put in offers for *Gigantosaurus* producer Cyber Group. Whether these companies can bounce back and achieve fresh success is still uncertain.

4 Canal+ breaks up

Vivendi has split broadcaster Canal+, publishing house Louis Hachette Group and ad agency Havas into three separate and independent companies. Canal+ and Hachette have a long history in the children's market, and that's likely to continue. But what these businesses do with more freedom and flexibility—and the extent to which they focus on kids content—remains to be seen.

5 Hitting the panic button

Even before he was sworn into office, US President Donald Trump promised to levy hefty international tariffs against countries including China as one of his first official acts. The global toy industry immediately started exploring how to counteract ripple effects that could drive toy prices up to unprecedented levels—a strong possibility since China ships 77% of the market's products.

8 Playable media

Netflix is expanding its Roblox footprint through a new partnership with Barrier Four to recreate pivotal scenes from family titles including *Spellbound* and *Cobra Kai*, using the platform's in-game assets. These scenes also feature playable experiences that signal a new brand engagement strategy for the streamer.

9 TAG sets an AI precedent

Members of The Animation Guild (IATSE Local 839) voted to ratify the 2024-2027 Animation Guild Master Agreement in December, setting the terms for US studio–animator relations for the next three years. The contract's AI protections could become a new standard for how the industry adapts to the technology.

10 Fee falling

The number of British households paying the nation's public television license fee dropped by half a million during the 2023/2024 fiscal year. This concerning trend likely means the BBC will need to develop new strategies for engaging cost-conscious families and luring young audiences away from streaming competitors.

Sowing new seeds

Edward Barnieh has been quietly setting up his own company to champion content from Africa, Asia and Latin America.

BY: SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN

Barnieh named his agency Oware after the Ashanti word for an ancient game that is still played worldwide by the global majority under different names

Since leaving BBC Studios Kids & Family in September 2024, Edward Barnieh has been busy laying the groundwork for his new creative agency, Oware.

It's a change of pace from the big media conglomerates where Barnieh has worked over the past 20 years, including Netflix, Warner Bros. Discovery and Nickelodeon. But it's also the kind of venture that many colleagues have encouraged him to pursue in order to fully flex his broad range of abilities and interests. "It's leveraging every skill I've [cultivated], from strategy and creative, to marketing and acquisitions," he says.

Oware will develop TV and film content originating from the "global majority"—the 85% of the world's population living in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The agency will also have a branded content arm to build a presence in the advertising world.

Barnieh says there's white space for a company that focuses on all global majority regions—especially given the shared values and cultural overlap that shape the similar content preferences underpinning these markets. The audience size is also encouraging, with the under-15 population estimated to be 1.08 billion in Asia, 592 million in Africa and 159 million in LatAm, according to Our World in Data.

Barnieh adds that the timing is also advantageous, as many of these countries now have distribution chains and platforms that didn't exist 10 years ago. "There's so much untapped talent who are often told to homogenize their show for Western audiences, which ends up being [detrimental] and can lead to a show that nobody likes."

Ultimately, Barnieh hopes to work on four to five projects per year, focusing mainly on 2D and CG animation (including anime).

He's currently in talks with investors in a bid to put together his financing—as a ballpark figure, he's looking to raise around US$4 million for this new venture. Once the seed funding is locked down, he plans on hiring to fill two executive positions—one overseeing the film/TV division and the other managing branded content.

Some may be wondering, why make branded content a dual focus? Why not keep it simple? But it's a diversification strategy that Barnieh has carefully developed as a funding model. "By doing branded content and making money there, I'm not beholden to make money from TV immediately," he explains. This additional revenue stream will help minimize the risk of developing shows in a rush, or having to steer away from Oware's core mission.

Barnieh is keen to ensure that any projects Oware takes on won't be watered down or homogenized for broader appeal. In terms of pitches, he already has his wishlist mapped out for each demo. For the preschool audience, he's looking for slice-of-life comedies; for the seven-plus crowd, he wants fantasy-based adventures; and for the teen/YA set, it's all about action-comedies.

Barnieh will leverage his development expertise to give all of Oware's projects a "slick and classy" feel. "You don't always need to have a high budget to have high production values," he says.

He's open to original ideas as well as concepts based on local folklore or public-domain IPs. But he has a preference for upbeat stories showing the positive side of life in these regions, as opposed to the kind of trauma-based content that was once quite typical for Africa. Traumatic storylines often paint a one-dimensional picture, he says. "But we can do lighthearted stuff. Characters can be funny or in love, and it will make sense to people in that region."

BBC STUDIOS

Kids&Family

We are excited to see you in San Diego for Kidscreen 2025

For sales information contact Katharina.Pietzsch@bbc.com

The Care Berry Switch brings two iconic brands together in a collab special that could provide a blueprint to increase revenue in troubled times

Sharing is caring

Cloudco and WildBrain are embracing a new strategy of bringing two IPs that are market competitors together in a friendly and toyetic partnership.

BY: RYAN TUCHOW

Cloudco Entertainment and WildBrain Studios are teaming up on a project that's just as sweet in terms of revenue and licensing potential as the brands involved.

In October, the two companies announced that they're co-producing a 44-minute animated preschool special called *The Care Berry Switch* (working title) that unites the Care Bears and Strawberry Shortcake in a content title for the very first time.

These brands—which have each thrived in the market for more than four decades—both have huge followings, so bringing them together should be a very smart business strategy. In the last year alone, they've collectively racked up roughly six million social media followers, generating 313 million impressions and 35 million engagements on TikTok, Instagram and Facebook, says Steph Betts, WildBrain's EVP of content creation.

Cloudco and WildBrain are aiming to parlay these considerable metrics into major content and consumer product wins for both companies, but their alliance is also a blueprint for brand crossovers, coming at a critical time for a troubled industry. While studios struggle to secure commissions and financing, increasing revenue potential by building complementary brand partnerships may be an option to consider.

This theme of coming together isn't just playing out on the business front; it's also baked into the premise of the special itself—which sees Strawberry Shortcake and Cheer Bear wish on the same star for a new adventure. The characters then end up in each other's worlds and must work together to protect them from villains.

Cloudco and WildBrain are co-developing the project and collaborating closely on all aspects of its creative evolution, from fleshing out the storyline, to interviewing writers. Spearheading the art direction is WildBrain's Vancouver studio, which is in constant communication with Cloudco to define the special's art style.

This particular brand team-up works well because the Care Bears and Strawberry Shortcake share a similar ethos around friendship and kindness. Plus, American Greetings originated both IPs as greeting cards only a few years apart. But even more critically, buyers increasingly want content that can support their channels and platforms with strong marketing programs, and these brands both have international reach and an engaged social media following that will help spread the word. And this kind of built-in popularity gives the crossover loads of value to broadcasters, says Betts.

Although there are no broadcast deals signed yet, consumer products partners have already recognized the market potential of this collab. Licensing teams at both companies have started building a co-branded program that spans apparel, sleepwear, beauty and collectibles, says Cloudco president Sean Gorman.

Products started rolling out in the US and Canada in fall 2024, and will continue to launch in those markets right into the 2025 holiday season. Some of the partners that are already on board include Samii Ryan (apparel), Blank Tag Co. (stickers), MjC (sleepwear), Silver Buffalo (home decor), High IntenCity (fashion jewelry and accessories), CultureFly (collectibles) and FYE (food & beverage).

"As we all know, the landscape in the kids & family market is shifting at the moment, but the capacity of known IPs and their connection to an audience is more important than ever," says Betts. "We felt that the power of these beloved brands would break through the noise that consumers and buyers face."

pocket.watch

Hit Shows starring The World's Top Kids and Family Creators

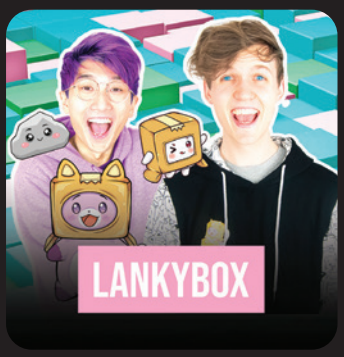
30K
Hours of Content

101K
Available Episodes

2B+
Hours viewed per year

1 x 83'

5 x 22'



60 x 22'

15 x 7'

215 x 22'

60 x 22'

75 x 22'

45 x 22'

75 x 22'

45 x 22'

45 x 22'

30 x 22'

Contact content@pocket.watch

© 2024 PocketWatch, Inc. The "pocket.watch" logos are trademarks of PocketWatch, Inc. The other logos depicted are trademarks of their respective rights holders.

With a distinctive visual style that's modeled after iconic European comic book series Asterix, *Lana Longbeard* is already resonating in the global market

Grassroots game plan

Canada's Copernicus has just launched an indie PC game on Steam to turn kids onto *Lana Longbeard* and help its first original series make it past season one.

BY: RYAN TUCHOW

Taking an atypical approach to building an audience for its first original series, *Lana Longbeard*, Canada's Copernicus Studios has also made and launched a companion PC video game called *Lana Longbeard and the Golden Stacks*, which rolled out in a demo phase on Steam at the end of January, following the comedy-adventure show's December 20 premiere on CBC Gem.

The game is a co-op action platformer that builds on the series' world, with players in character navigating different levels and fighting enemies including skeletons and a giant spider. If it takes off, Copernicus will invest in building out *Lana Longbeard and the Golden Stacks* beyond the demo stage, with 15 levels initially planned.

It's a bold move for the Halifax-based animation service studio, which hadn't made an original series before, let alone a video game. But its executives knew they needed to think outside the box to give *Lana Longbeard* a chance of building a big enough fan base to have longevity beyond season one.

"We don't want this to just get aired, and everyone gets paid and moves on to the next job," says Dylan Edwards, head of development at Copernicus. "We want to get behind [*Lana Longbeard*] in a big way and push it, because we really believe in it."

A 2D-animated co-pro with France's Zephyr Animation, the 52 x 11-minute series has a budget of US$8.9 million. Its premise revolves around a spirited and curious 12-year-old Viking girl who joins her father and a crew of rogues on an overseas voyage in search of treasure.

EU broadcasters including Super RTL (Germany), Gulli (France) and Warner Bros. Discovery EMEA have acquired *Lana Longbeard* for their Q2 programming lineups, but first it will broaden its Canadian footprint when it starts airing on Family Channel in Q1.

Even with early buyer support behind it, waiting to see if the show becomes a hit is not a viable business strategy. So when a few friends of Copernicus VP/partner Murray Bain were laid off by computer peripherals and software manufacturer Logitech due to an ongoing gaming industry downturn, he paid out of pocket to get them working on *Lana Longbeard and the Golden Stacks*.

In roughly six weeks, they made a proof-of-concept that Copernicus used to secure funding from Shaw Rocket Fund, which covered the entire cost of making the game demo. And six people have been working on the build using Unity since March.

The goal is to create something unique that grabs kids' attention where they're spending the most time, says Bain. And rather than just dropping Lana into an existing game app, Copernicus wanted to make a more significant entrance into the gaming market. "You can't just make a show—you have to make a brand. We were inspired by *Cuphead*, which started out as a small prototype and is now a worldwide brand."

Bain adds that creating the game for PCs and launching it via Steam (a video game digital distribution service and storefront operated by Valve Corporation) were also intentional strategic moves because that space isn't as oversaturated as the mobile game market or Roblox.

Now that Copernicus has made its first game, the studio is open to producing indie titles for other companies—a service that Bain anticipates will likely be increasingly in demand as other producers look for ways to help their brands stand out and go the distance.

SEASON 2 (52x11') AVAILABLE NOW

Come see us at Kidscreen: Marriott Marquis, North Tower,
Commodore Presidential Suite Room #2518

SPIN MASTER ENTERTAINMENT

© & TM Spin Master Ltd. All rights reserved.

BIG GIG Craig Hunter

THE BIG GIG: Senior creative executive at Amazon Kids+

PREVIOUSLY: Global head of kids & family at YouTube

CONTENT LEADER: With a design/advertising degree and a Channel 4 internship under his belt, Hunter began his career focused on other programming genres. But then Fox Kids came knocking in 2003 and swept him into the world of kids TV. Shortly after he joined, Fox Kids was acquired by The Walt Disney Company, and Hunter spent almost two years there, followed by increasingly senior positions at Nickelodeon (creative content manager) and Sony Pictures Television (director of kids networks).

Hunter's two years at YouTube—where he was working as global head of kids and family when he was let go in 2023's mass layoffs—were especially influential. "It was a really big responsibility to have ownership of content that millions of kids would see—that's something that's stuck with me," he says, adding that a career highlight was the Emmy-winning YouTube series *Tab Time*, which he helped develop with Kids At Play. "That project was very special to me."

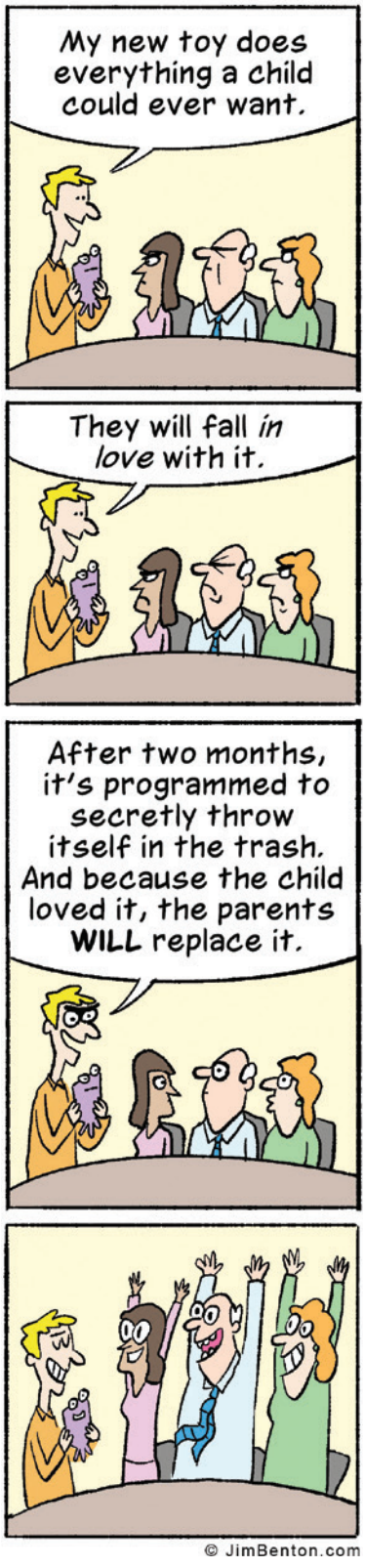
NEW ECOSYSTEM: After a year of independent consulting, Hunter made an under-the-radar move to join Amazon in June 2024 to head up series development and production for the company's kids service. He says he's still getting used to the cross-sector landscape of his new gig—while he's strictly working on the video content side, the platform also offers books and games, so those teams occasionally help facilitate pitches by sending over specific titles for him to look at.

To build out Amazon's programming slate for three- to 12-year-olds, Hunter is looking for format-agnostic TV concepts based on "brands, characters and trends that kids already know and love" in order to cut through in a crowded marketplace of platforms and grab kids' attention. These could stem from any source, including existing TV series, movies, games and books. And his firsthand success with YouTube content means Hunter is also keen to hear pitches inspired by creators and digital-first IPs.

STANDING OUT: He's looking for content with a fresh take or unique hook that sets it apart from properties offered by competitors. A perfect example is *Bat-Family*, an upcoming spinoff series to Prime Video's 2023 *Merry Little Batman* film that Hunter is spearheading in partnership with Warner Bros. Animation. Due out in 2025, this 2D toon focuses on an eight-year-old version of Damian Wayne (an incarnation of Robin, and Bruce Wayne's only biological child). —Sadhana Bharanidharan

Know your audience

BY: JIM BENTON


My new toy does everything a child could ever want.
They will fall *in love* with it.
After two months, it's programmed to secretly throw itself in the trash. And because the child loved it, the parents WILL replace it.
© JimBenton.com

WildBrain™

Come see us at Kidscreen Summit

sales@wildbrain.com

© 2025 WildBrain Ltd.

Nothing but net zero

Thanks to broadcaster mandates and new funding requirements, producers need to reduce their carbon footprints if they want to get commissions.

BY: RYAN TUCHOW

Making kids TV can be a dirty business—if not in terms of negotiating deals and revenue splits, then certainly in terms of the carbon emissions involved in producing and selling a series.

Globally, the entertainment industry is estimated to generate millions of metric tons of carbon dioxide each year, according to the Producers Guild of America. (In 2019, the global production of feature films alone emitted 4.2 million tons of CO2 into the atmosphere, says global analytics firm Omdia.)

To counteract the harm the industry is doing to the planet and its inhabitants, European broadcasters and studios are leading an industry-wide push to reduce carbon emissions (the greenhouse gases that are driving climate change). The goal is to make systemic changes designed to get to net-zero status, with minimal reliance on offset programs—but a phased approach is going to be necessary to achieve net zero.

Government mandates and new requirements from major broadcasters and funding bodies are galvanizing these changes. As a result, there's increasing pressure for producers to calculate and reduce their carbon impact. And with more and more broadcasters requiring productions to reduce their carbon footprint, planning ahead is the key to not getting left behind.

The UK leads the way

The industry has been making noise about greening up its act for several years now, but talk isn't enough anymore, says Órlaith Rogers, a junior communications manager at albert, the BAFTA-owned carbon calculator and production certification tool that has been adopted by the UK industry and is increasingly catching on with networks and studios around the world.

All major British broadcasters now require producers to get an albert certification before their projects can be commissioned or renewed. This means that each company must report data quantifying its carbon footprint, develop a plan to reduce emissions, and provide evidence of actions taken towards this end.

"We entertain and inform millions of people in the UK, and it's incumbent upon us to expand our own efforts to manage our environmental footprint," says Louise Bucknole, GM of kids and family at Paramount UK & Ireland. "We measure our production footprints using the albert carbon tool and mandate that all of our productions seek certification."

Many prodcos are already using albert. Last year, 3,000-plus productions did a carbon footprint calculation (11% more than in 2022), and nearly all of them got certified, says Rogers. Certification

requires productions to complete a Carbon Action Plan during the pre-production stage to map out how the company intends to reduce its carbon emissions as much as possible through to the end of post-production. This can include measures like switching to low-energy lighting during location shoots, using reusable batteries and recycling set dressings at the end of production.

While all of that may seem daunting—especially to producers who haven't had to take those steps before—Paramount UK and distributor Serious Kids offer up a model for others to follow with their new live-action series *Treehouse* (30 x seven minutes), which is in production at London-based RD Studios and set to premiere in Paramount's Milkshake! preschool block this spring.

The team behind *Treehouse* focuses on production sustainability in several different ways. For example, RD Studios is powered by solar panels, and the show's sets are built from recyclable cardboard so they can be pulped and repurposed when they're no longer needed, rather than thrown into a landfill. This approach is also more economically sound—pulping worn-down or no-longer-needed set furnishings could potentially save producers thousands of dollars in storage costs.

It's becoming more and more critical for studios to be able to account for the carbon emissions of their productions because this information is increasingly important to broadcasters and streamers worried about their own carbon footprints. Netflix has pledged to cut its emissions roughly in half by 2030, for example,

Thuristar/La Cabane switched to Unreal Engine for *Mush-Mush & the Mushables* season two, cutting down on render farms, electricity and air conditioning

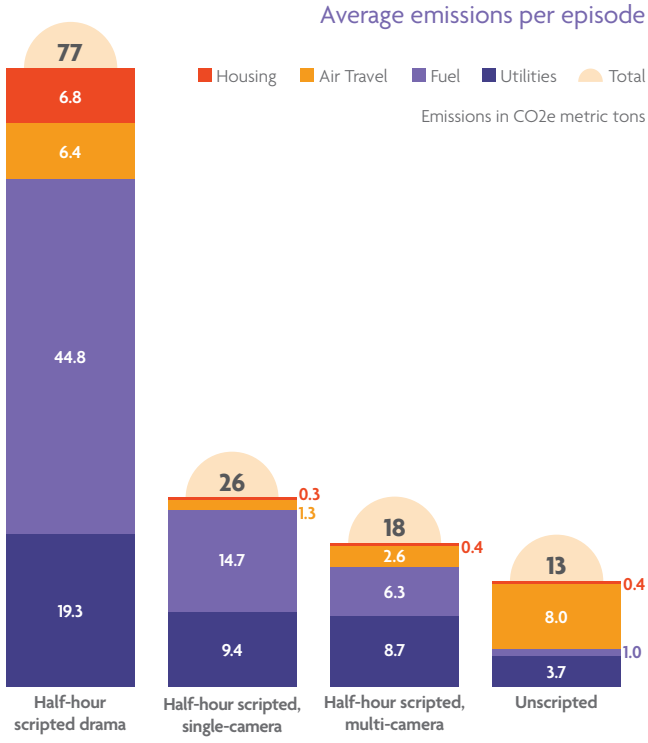
and Paramount UK has set 46% as its reduction goal for the same timeframe. This will include a mix of Scope 1 emissions (which the company generates directly through its own actions, such as operating fleets of non-electric vehicles) and Scope 2 emissions (which are indirectly generated from processes like buying electricity or energy from utility companies that burn hydrocarbons for fuel).

But then there are Scope 3 emissions that need to be accounted for, and these ones are generated by the production of content that a broadcaster has licensed from a third-party supplier. And for its part, Paramount UK has also pledged to reduce these emissions by 2030.

As a major operator, Paramount UK sees the need to set an example in the industry, so it's trying its best to greenlight productions with sustainable themes; work towards decarbonization domestically; and ensure its productions adopt best practices to reduce emissions, says Bucknole. "We were delighted that the team behind *Treehouse* had worked so hard in these areas as we are very keen to ensure all our productions are as sustainable as possible, and this was a big tick from us at Paramount."

Canada joins the movement

Across the pond, Canada has started collecting and reporting carbon emissions data more recently. The CBC kicked things off in 2022, and children's programming had the third-highest carbon emissions of all of the public broadcaster's productions (an average of almost 25



Treehouse is sustainably produced at London's RD Studios using solar power and recylable sets

CO2eq metric tons per hour), behind only by drama (75 CO2eq metric tons per hour) and comedy (just over 50 CO2eq metric tons per hour). Carbon dioxide equivalent, or CO2eq, is the measurement used to calculate all greenhouse gas emissions, such as methane and CO2.

The CBC hasn't tied commissions to net-zero emissions yet, but it does require producers to use the albert calculator, provide a carbon footprint production report, and fill out a checklist during development that asks questions like, "Do you and your writers use renewable energy and eco-friendly travel options?"

Its team has found that travel, transportation and filming spaces (both studios and shooting locations) are among the biggest contributors to higher emissions, so the pubcaster recommends that producers use low- or carbon-free options for travel, and leverage tools like virtual production.

For Toronto-based Dark Slope Studios, which operates filming facilities and soundstages, the future of reducing carbon emissions is its 75-foot LED volume wall. It features panels that can show 3D footage behind actors, and according to a November 2023 report from Northern Ireland's Ulster University, this type of virtual production is capable of reducing carbon emissions by 20% to 50% compared to traditional filming methods like location shoots.

Then there's the big question of cost. Sustainability proponents often use the term Green Premium, which refers to the extra cost of choosing a clean production option compared to a more business-as-usual approach. In many ways, it might seem like going green and saving money are mutually exclusive. But data from Earth Angel Canada and a 2023 report from the Canadian Media Producers Association (*Towards a Green Budget Framework in Canada*) indicate there are net-positive cost savings of roughly US$18,000 at stake for producers who opt for green transport and generator options on a live-action feature film production budgeted at US$7.1 million.

The key for producers is to look at more than just one line in their spreadsheets to determine whether going green is saving them money, says Marsha Newbery, VP of sustainability and business affairs at Vancouver-based Thunderbird Entertainment. For example, it may be more expensive to rent electric vehicles, but they don't need to be fuelled up with gas, and they produce less carbon.

Newbery says a show's sustainability efforts should start on the page. She works with development and production teams at Thunderbird and Atomic Cartoons to train writers on best practices such as planning fewer night scenes to reduce the cost and emissions involved in transporting and powering stage lights.

Thunderbird takes a bite out of emissions

Scripted production is one of the largest generators of emissions in media, and Thunderbird Entertainment staffers were eager to reduce the footprint of *Reginald the Vampire* as it went into production on season two.

Great Pacific Media's live-action vampire horror-comedy for the teen and YA set (which was canceled by Syfy after its first two seasons) didn't have any additional money in its budget for sustainability, says Marsha Newbery, Thunderbird's VP of sustainabiity and business affairs.

So the production team had to think about building it into the way the season was shot. Production guidelines specified that shooting locations had to be within a 10-minute drive of the central hub known as "the circus" (where all the trailers are), which didn't move all season. This saved on labor expenses and fuel consumption, and when the sets were farther away (about 5% of the time), there were on-set green rooms for wardrobe, hair and makeup so the cast didn't need to drive back and forth.

These strategies yielded some impressive results. *Reginald*'s 10 x 60-minute second season achieved a 62% reduction in carbon emissions (mainly due to reduced gasoline usage, which also saved the company around US$90,000) and a 67% drop in diesel consumption. Season two's fuel footprint was 176.76 metric tons of CO2eq, compared to 467.77 metric tons in season one.

A shorter shooting schedule and being able to reuse sets and costumes from season one also drove reductions in emissions from catering, flights, materials and building energy use.

"Climate change isn't a future crisis—it's a current crisis," says Newbery. "And it's important for companies to identify the things they're doing right and share these examples with other producers and creative teams to show what's possible." —Ryan Tuchow

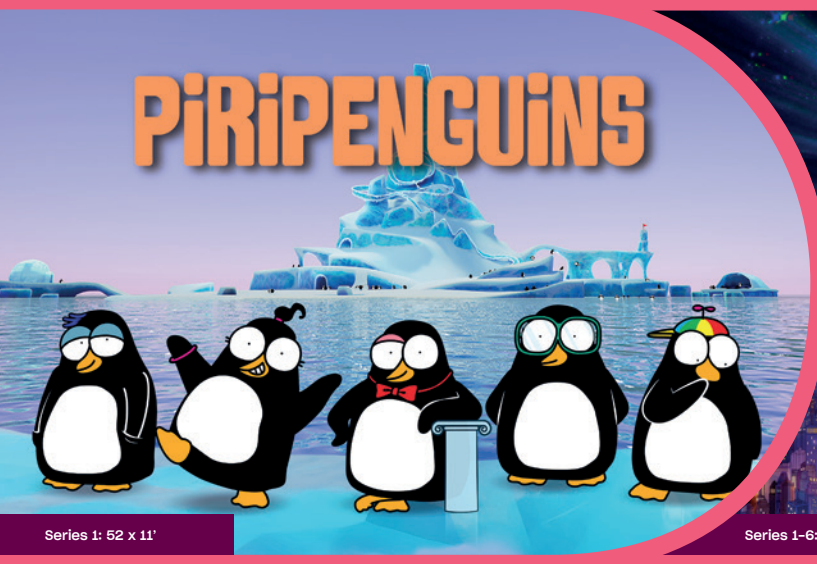
Reginald the Vampire reduced its carbon footprint by 62% between seasons one and two

Banijay
Kids & Family

Home of Leading Global Kids Brands

Series 1: 52 x 11'

Series 1: 52 x 11'



Series 1: 52 x 11'

Series 1-6: 26 x 22' Series 7: 26 x 22'

Meet us at Kidscreen Summit!
Torrey Pines Suite 1

Contact sales@banijaykids.com

banijaykidsandfamily.com

THE CHIMERA KEEPERS © MONELLO PRODUCTIONS – BELVISION – RTBF. With the participation of France Télévisions. © Tiger Aspect Kids & Family Limited, Movimenti Production, Zodiak Kids & Family France and Monello Productions 2024. Piripenguins: ©Eaglet Films Limited / Red Monk Studio S.R.L. 2024. Totally Spies!©2024 Zodiak Kids & Family France. In participation with Gulli – M6 – Warner Bros. Discovery.

Highest emission contributors

ANIMATION

Rigging/Animation	24 CO2eq
Production/Directing	22 CO2eq
Studio/Indirect Costs	15 CO2eq
Writing/Storyboards/Animatics	10 CO2eq
Assets/Layout/Composition/FX	8 CO2eq
Lab/Deliveries	8 CO2eq
Audio Post-Production	2 CO2eq
Server	2 CO2eq

LIVE-ACTION FILMS

Budgets of US$20-million or less

Fuel (production vehicles and generators)	217 tons CO2eq
Utilities	66 CO2eq
Air Travel	56 CO2eq
Housing	52 CO2eq

SCRIPTED TV EPISODES

Multi-camera, 30 minutes

Fuel	6.3 CO2eq
Utilities	8.7 CO2eq
Air Travel	2.6 CO2eq
Housing	0.4 CO2eq

Source: *Carbon Emissions of Film and Television Production* report (2021), Sustainable Production Alliance

Using a new tool called Carbulator, MIAM! found that meals were the largest carbon generator on its hit show *The Tinies*

That's a solution for live-action shows, but it's more difficult to make the production process greener in animation. Newbery says this is partly because there's no consensus yet in the sector on best practices for bringing emissions down, and generally less attention is paid to this problem in animation than in live action.

But that's beginning to change. People working in the animation industry tend to be younger than their film counterparts, and they're starting to push their employers to make more efforts to reduce emissions, says Newbery. "We have to decarbonize as an industry. There's storytelling potential in this as well because there's growing [buyer] interest in how we put climate action on screen."

And it's not just Thunderbird that's thinking along these lines—in September, the CBC-led coalition Green Frame was formed, bringing 11 government-supported organizations and funds together to reduce the environmental impact of film and TV production in Canada. The group aims to encourage sustainability at every stage of a production's life cycle—from commission through distribution—and to reach a consensus on how the industry calculates and reduces its emissions.

France's new requirements

As of March 1, 2025, all animated content and video game productions in France seeking funding from the National Centre for Cinema and the Moving Image (CNC) will need to provide provisional and final assessments of their carbon footprint when submitting requests for development or production funding. Called the "eco-conditionality measure," this requirement has been in place for live-action series and films since January 2024. Additionally, European broadcasters have to abide by the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive for reporting their own sustainability efforts, which is putting pressure on their content suppliers to do the same.

To pave the way for adopting these new processes, AnimFrance has worked with MIAM! Animation (*Edmond and Lucy, The Tinies*) and other studios including Superprod, Illumination and TeamTO to develop a carbon calculator called Carbulator. This tool can be used to quantify a production's carbon footprint within two hours, and it should be available to the industry later this year, says MIAM! CEO Hanna Mouchez.

Producers input their total emissions data into Carbulator and then allocate the results to different parts of the production, including hardware (servers), setup and teams, says Mouchez. This differs from existing calculators that are made for live-action projects and only calculate emissions related to filming.

The next step is getting this tool into the hands of producers outside of France in order to achieve more industry-wide uniformity in calculation methodology and to facilitate data-sharing.

Using Carbulator to track emissions in real time for its CG-animated series *The Tinies*, MIAM! found that meals generated the most carbon (35% of its total emissions in 2023), followed by project hardware and software, commuting, office energy and business trips.

Another prodco that has embraced Carbulator is La Cabane/Thuristar, which used the tool to calculate its footprint on season two of CG-animated series *Mush-Mush & the Mushables*. Switching to Unreal Engine for the show's second season decreased rendering times by 95%, in turn requiring fewer render farms and less electricity and air conditioning, says La Cabane/Thuristar's founder Perrine Gauthier.

"Information and awareness are key to reducing our industry's carbon footprint. Teams and company owners need to be trained to better understand energy consumption [and] reduce waste production."

Content Sales: jbuzzelli@konamicrossmediasales.com
konamicrossmediany.com • yugioh.com

KONAMI

Pingu ended its run more than two decades ago, but remains part of the zeitgeist, thanks to funny internet memes that have gone viral

Going viral

Leveraging quirky internet culture can help kids entertainment brands generate laughs, maintain market presence and reach larger audiences.

BY: SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN

Funny internet content has evolved from the niche in-jokes that were all the rage on websites in the 2000s, to a ubiquitous meme-based digital communication system that blends pop-culture references with user-generated content to convey universally recognizable ideas, concepts or feelings.

It's a language that's used and understood by consumers of all ages. And because of that wholesale adoption, it's rich with brand promotion opportunities.

So it's no surprise that major entertainment studios have embraced memes for their cultural relevance and ability to attract audiences—from simple tactics like Netflix retweeting fandom in-jokes, to the giant-scale Barbenheimer double-bill phenomenon that originated with women on social media, and everything in between.

But really, the watershed moment came when a fan-created #gentleminions meme lifted ticket sales for CG-animated kids feature *Minions: The Rise of Gru* (2022) to US$940 million worldwide—thanks to suit-wearing teenagers attending screenings like they were formal events—demonstrating the power of meme culture to turn a normal movie run into a global brand movement.

And kids IP owners of all shapes and sizes have been trying to recreate that magic since, using memes and viral content ranging from accessible GIFs to TikTok trends to attract younger viewers and convert short, catchy content into meaningful, lasting impressions.

Strategic comedy

Media consultant and Disney/BBC alum Jo Redfern, who specializes in digital strategy, says audience-transformed content and interpretations are key to larger franchise development plans. "Meme culture can be part of the flywheel, ideally driving interest back to core content and providing real-time insights into what resonates," she says, noting that memes also invite kids into the content as co-creators of the story. "That's the kind of authentic engagement that traditional marketing no longer achieves."

As #gentleminions demonstrated so well, another potential advantage is the opportunity to reel in older or non-targeted audiences. Nearly 75% of 15- to 43-year-olds say they've opted to watch a film after seeing memes/viral content about it, according to an August 2024 poll of 1,600 US consumers conducted by UTA IQ.

Memes can also drive fresh and consistent engagement to extend a show's relevance. With Pingu, for example, Mattel has been closely tracking how this brand, based on an '90s stop-motion series, has maintained a market presence (despite ending in the 2000s) through viral internet memes with funny fan-generated captions and out-of-context moments—for example, a clip of a sobbing Pingu with the caption, "Me when my bestie doesn't come to school."

Pingu generates 100,000 monthly social mentions on average, according to Brandwatch data. And Mattel plans to actively leverage this existing buzz when it gears up to release an upcoming movie that's in development with Aardman Animations.

"Pingu's virality is at the heart of our franchise strategy," says Aimee London, Mattel's VP of global franchise marketing. "We're exploring ways to amplify this through digital-first content, social media engagement and strategic creator collaborations."

Though they may cause some teens to roll their eyes, GIFs are still integral to how people of all ages communicate online. And that makes these playful mini-clips powerful viral marketing tools. "When a kid drops a SpongeBob reaction GIF in their group chat or shares a Molang moment with friends, they're not just communicating—they're advocating for the show without even realizing it," says Redfern.

GIFs are also the bread and butter of GIPHY, which provides 1.7 billion daily users with a GIF-based search engine on major platforms including WhatsApp, iMessage and Slack. As it turns out, kids and animated brands tend to shine here—when GIPHY

QUÉBECRÉATIF

@ Kidscreen

Meet the Québec delegation at the Canada Pavilion

Andicha Média
Apartment 11 Productions
Difuze
Divertissement Verité Québec
Echo Media
Encore Télévision-Distribution
Epic Storyworlds
Gasolina Studios
Happy Camper Média
Image-in Atlantique
KO Distribution
Maki Média
Prëmo
Prestigo Storyverse
PVP Distribution
PVP Media
Télé-Québec
Trio Orange

Kidscreen Awards 2025 Nominee for • Best Web/App Series—Original
Coco Boo • Image-in Atlantique

SODEC
Québec

ranked its top GIFs of 2023, an animation of Mo Willems' Elephant and Piggie characters doing a "happy dance" claimed the number-one spot, with 1.8 billion views.

GIF it up

But GIPHY editor-in-chief Tyler Menzel says the platform is somewhat underused by the kids industry as a brand-building strategy—especially when it comes to reaching the grown-ups in kids' lives, since 53% of GIPHY users are shopping on behalf of children, according to internal research. While one quick (and free) option is to create GIFs from existing video content using GIPHY's on-board tools, Menzel is eager to work with kids brands to develop more exclusive GIPHY content.

"We know what people are searching for. And using insights we've learned over 10-plus years, we can help customize this content to [maximize outreach]," says Menzel. One recent example was a *Call of Duty: Black Ops 6* GIPHY campaign that ran in October, featuring custom GIFs of the game's characters re-enacting well-known memes (including Homer Simpson backing into a bush).

There are a number of ways brand owners can turn this type of engagement into awareness and/or viewership, says Menzel, including strategically placing a watermark on the image or attaching a YouTube link to the episode a GIF was pulled from—an approach Mattel has used for Pingu.

According to GIPHY's internal research, 73% of GIF users actively search for a new GIF to use every time, providing a breeding ground for introducing new brands.

In 2022, South Korea's MOSTAPES uploaded a batch of GIFs with playful animations from *Dinosally*, a new 2D-animated preschool series it was developing. These colorful toon clips overlaid with greetings like "Happy Friday!" or "Good morning!" took off fast, exceeding 30 billion collective views on GIPHY. And this demonstration of character appeal helped attract co-pro partners PGS Entertainment and Aurora World to the project.

"Visually, as we monitored reactions through traffic on GIPHY, we realized that people respond strongly to two things—a rhythmic loop and comedic twists," says MOSTAPES founder Jay Kim. And given the current financing climate for kids TV, the team is exploring other digital formats for *Dinosally* that can build from its established GIF success. Going forward, Kim says MOSTAPES will continue to tease and test its new IPs on GIPHY—characters from its latest concept *Mikitti*, about a crew of pirate cats, have picked up three billion views so far since rolling out on GIPHY in August.

Hidden Pigeon Company put a Henson-created puppet to work in a series of funny memes
Leaving the store and realizing you forgot to buy the ONE thing you went for

Reflecting the zeitgeist

Going beyond GIFs, Mo Willems' publishing brand revamped its social media playbook last year, with Hidden Pigeon Company franchise management SVP Tori Cook guiding the journey into modern meme culture.

"A meme is someone's witty, clever interpretation of a very animated expression—and the Pigeon and [Willems'] properties have certainly been built off of that," notes Cook, underlining how memes can add cross-generational appeal to an IP by creating something—in this case, laugh-out-loud content—that helps foster a connection between different groups, such as Gen Alpha kids and their Millennial and Gen-Z parents.

For example, Cook references an Elephant and Piggie TikTok that mashed up a trending audio clip from reality series *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* (Kourtney saying, "It's just not cool that you copy me") with images of Piggie looking insecure around other characters in pig costumes.

To speed up social content creation for today's fast-moving digital landscape, the team used a Pigeon puppet (which Jim Henson's Creature Shop created for an existing YouTube series called *The Pigeon Explains!*) to film funny live-action videos, instead of relying purely on animation.

The style of humor for the short videos stayed close to the IP—Pigeon's hyperactive and stubborn personality channels into relatable memes about struggling to get through a school week, for example, while his penchant for breaking the fourth wall is perfect for TikTok videos in which he speaks to the viewer directly.

Building multi-generational appeal means referencing pop-culture memes in a timely way. So, at the same time that Paramount released its *Mean Girl* reboot in January 2024, the HPC team dropped a TikTok video showing Pigeon aggressively competing to be Regina George; it quickly racked up 2.7 million plays.

But there's a delicate balance when it comes to choosing which trend waves to ride, says Cook. For a kids IP, content needs to be funny but family-friendly, and quirky but never unkind.

"HPC exercises caution, especially for a character like the Pigeon, who is depicted to love the attention and be in tune with the latest internet trends generating big laughs," she says. "We're mindful that he never pokes fun at something or someone, which often happens in meme culture."

This meme strategy has helped spawn an impressive 6.8% engagement rate for Mo Willems Workshop on TikTok, compared to the industry average of 3% to 5%. And engagement outweighs views on this platform because it strengthens fandom-building and creates a "feedback loop" for HPC, notes Cook. The official account frequently interacts with commenters, trading funny quips with fans and fielding questions about upcoming books and plush/puppets.

Fostering this kind of engagement ultimately helps offset some of the broader concerns about meme-fueled marketing—such as whether the corporatization of memes could eventually turn fans off. But smaller brand owners may actually have an advantage on this front, given that major studios are more likely to miss the mark of speaking the language of internet culture in their need to engage as broadly as possible, says Redfern.

"Indie studios can be more genuine and less corporate in their approach, so they may win on authenticity and agility if they have the right team. Often, they can also respond faster to trends without lengthy approvals, if empowered to do so." k

MEET US AT KIDSCREEN SUMMIT TO PREVIEW OUR EXCITING NEW SLATE!

SCHOLASTIC ENTERTAINMENT | 9 STORY™ MEDIA GROUP

© Scholastic Entertainment Inc. SCHOLASTIC & logos ™ Scholastic Inc. CLIFFORD & logos ™ Bridwell Trust. All rights reserved. © and ™ 9 Story Media Group Inc. All rights reserved.

Moonbug's YouTube original *CoComelon* continues to reign as the most-watched kids show on Netflix by a 5% margin, and its *CoComelon Lane* spinoff has also cracked the streamer's top-10 list

Shrinking pipeline

When it comes to kids content, YouTube feeds Netflix. The problem is, original IP development on YouTube has dried up.

BY: EMILY HORGAN

YouTube is Netflix's main competitor, but the two companies don't really like saying that. Instead, obfuscation abounds. The standard party line tends to be, "We're complementary." And Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos has proclaimed, "We feed each other pretty nicely."

Looking at adult audiences—and, more specifically, audiences of the marquee streaming shows that Netflix is obsessed with—the two platforms do feed each other to a certain extent. YouTube is fertile marketing ground for Netflix, providing the streamer with trailer hype and viral interview moments from the PR campaign trail.

Of course, this drives engagement for YouTube as well, although it's pretty much a drop in the ocean of views the platform accumulates by the second.

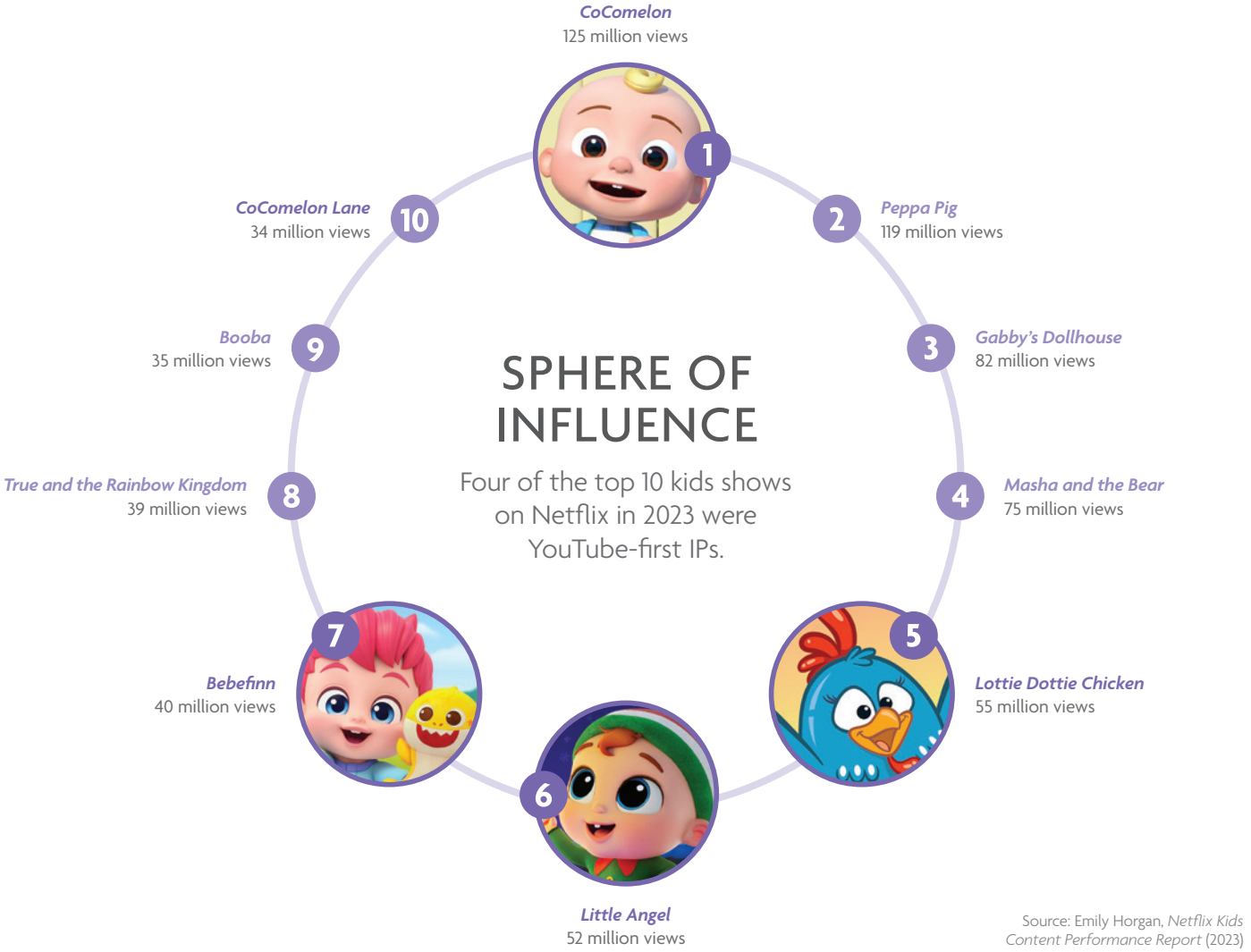
Netflix likes to emphasize its premium offerings and take what co-CEO Greg Peters calls "big creative bets." This implies that YouTube is less-than, but these days we know that YouTube content covers the whole spectrum of quality. It's a thriving production ecosystem—a creative economy where the cost of entry spans multiple tiers. You can be at home with an iPhone in your bedroom, or you can have a 30-person studio behind you. And many kids producers are even using YouTube to drive discovery and directly distribute traditional TV programming.

One area where YouTube and Netflix don't feed each other is the kids space—especially preschool. Here, the relationship is very much one-way: YouTube feeds Netflix. Distilling trends from the 2023 *Netflix Kids Content Performance Report* shows that four of the top 10 animated series on the platform were YouTube-derived nursery rhyme IPs.

In recent years, Netflix has pivoted its kids strategy to double down on IPs that have already established an audience base elsewhere. *Gabby's Dollhouse* was the last Netflix-originated hit to emerge, and there weren't loads of others before it.

Many original series that have done well on Netflix have intrinsic built-in awareness. Derivatives of well-known brands include *Jurassic World Camp Cretaceous*, *Sonic Prime* and *My Little Pony: Make Your Mark*. These all ride the wave of robust YouTube presences that keep the engagement lights on in between series drops on the streamer.

© Gifted SPV Ltd / BBC - 2025
GIFTED
10 x 28'
Available Fall 2025
STUDIO 100 INTERNATIONAL
for more information:
distribution@studio100int.com | studio100international.com
BLACK CAMEL PICTURES
media valley
BBC
STUDIO 100 INTERNATIONAL
onegate
NDR
SCREEN SCOTLAND
SGRÌN ALBA
LIPSYNC



Source: Emily Horgan, *Netflix Kids Content Performance Report* (2023)

For Netflix's preschool business, YouTube has been a major originator of IPs that are now well-established. *CoComelon*, which launched in 2020, is still an out-and-out leader (although its performance has not been as strong of late). Coming behind it, *Bebefinn* from Pinkfong is making up ground, as are Moonbug's *Little Angel* and *Lottie Dottie Chicken* (*Galinha Pintadinha* in its native Portuguese language).

A few years ago, this flow of content development could have persisted indefinitely, because YouTube was constantly adding new and more advanced content brands to its offering. Nursery rhymes will always be a staple, but there was also a wave of newcomers that included *Gecko's Garage, Morphle* and *Carl's Carwash*.

However, that quickly changed when a seismic shift in the YouTube business model put a stop to the platform's viability as a place where you could develop IPs while building audiences. In 2019, YouTube was caught with its pants down on kids safety and fined US$170 million by the FTC for violations against the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), after which the platform implemented significant policy changes.

There is obviously no question that it was right for YouTube to address the major child-safety issues on its platform. But the unfortunate flip side of these decisions was a massive financial depression for all kids creators that continues today. One result of this is that germinating new kids content and creators on YouTube from scratch is becoming less and less sustainable.

This is something that should be concerning for both YouTube and Netflix, and for the kids media sector as a whole. Platforms are commissioning fewer series that fit the old model, and Netflix itself is very averse to taking any swings on original kids content. (As mentioned earlier, the streamer now seems inclined to cling to series based on established brands, like a security blanket.)

From an engagement point of view, there is no doubt that YouTube can steer the wheel on both IP generation and successful deployment, but without financial buoyancy, the ship will inevitably sink. And this invites the question: Will the future of new original kids content be left stranded? K

EMILY HORGAN is an independent kids media consultant specializing in YouTube and streaming platforms, and the author of the *Netflix Kids Content Performance Report*. Find out more at ehorgmedia.com.

ADVERTORIAL

Teaching Emotional Resilience Through Fun: *Stomp! Stomp! Rhinos!*

OAK9 Entertainment, a leading producer of children's content, is set to expand its acclaimed animated preschool series, *Stomp! Stomp! Rhinos!*, with a third season. The upcoming installment focuses on teaching children to manage sadness, building on the success of earlier seasons that tackled anger and anxiety. Designed to foster emotional intelligence, *Stomp! Stomp! Rhinos!* blends vibrant animation with psychological insight, making it a standout choice for parents and industry stakeholders seeking engaging and meaningful content. The series not only entertains but also empowers young viewers with actionable tools for managing emotions, while encouraging co-viewing experiences that resonate with families.

Season 1-3 Highlights: Practical Tools for Anger, Fear, Anxiety and Sadness Management

In each episode, the supportive Rhino family offers simple, actionable methods to help kids recharge their emotional batteries. These activities include:

- **Breathing techniques:** Playful ways to introduce slow breathing, like blowing bubbles.
- **Dance Breaks:** Physical exertion really helps to lift the mood.
- **Children mindfulness exercises:** playful ways to return to here and now.
- **Good Mood Boxes:** Personalized collections of joyful keepsakes, such as photos or small toys, to revisit during tough moments.
- **Life Wisdom Songs:** Catchy tunes with empowering messages like “Patience is your strength” and “You don’t have to win to have fun.”
- **And much more!**

Rugilė Kazlauskienė, clinical psychologist and co-creator of the series, emphasizes the importance of these exercises in helping preschoolers develop emotional skills. “Taking a break to regulate your emotions is one of the essential psychological skills. It helps to return to challenge with renewed positivity,” she explains.

Infusing Fun and Imagination into Learning

Stomp! Stomp! Rhinos! also delivers family-friendly humor and creative play ideas, from crafting cardboard castles to creating indoor starry skies. Co-creator Vytautas Tautkevičius reflects on the power of imagination: “Children can make extraordinary adventures out of the simplest objects. We’ve woven that sense of wonder into every episode, along with humor that helps families laugh together - even during life’s tough moments.”OAK9 Entertainment’s commitment to emotional education sets this series apart in the crowded children’s media landscape. By addressing universal challenges like sadness, anger, and anxiety through engaging storytelling, the show aligns with the growing demand for purposeful content that supports childhood development.

For networks and streamers, *Stomp! Stomp! Rhinos!* offers a fresh, innovative addition to preschool programming - combining emotional growth with unforgettable entertainment.

Be the first to get the news from Stomp! Stomp! Rhinos! And subscribe to the newsletter: **www.stompstomprhinos.com**

Contact for sales: www.boatrockercontentsales.com
Contact OAK9 for any other inquires: info@oak9e.com

ON TREND

Moving upstream

According to Circana's VP and Media Entertainment industry advisor John Buffone, 90% of US households with internet access subscribe to at least one SVOD service these days, and the average is five. This market growth has been driven, in part, by households with children under age 18—nearly all of these homes (97%) are paying for some form of streaming, and they tend to subscribe to more services on average as well.[1]

Mirroring the linear TV landscape, most of the top-performing kids series on SVODs belong to well-established franchises. And this broad trend is poised to continue throughout 2025.[2]

[1]Circana, TV Switching Study [2]Circana, Subscription Video Track

Top kids TV series by streaming platform in the US

Disney+

1	*Bluey*	6	*Jessie*
2	*Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*	7	*Big City Greens*
3	*Spidey and His Amazing Friends*	8	*Mickey Mouse Funhouse*
4	*Puppy Dog Pals*	9	*Gravity Falls*
5	*Phineas and Ferb*	10	*SuperKitties*

NETFLIX

1	*CoComelon*	6	*Grizzy and the Lemmings*
2	*Avatar: The Last Airbender*	7	*CoComelon Lane*
3	*Gabby's Dollhouse*	8	*Peppa Pig*
4	*Little Angel*	9	*Masha and the Bear*
5	*Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug and Cat Noir*	10	*The Boss Baby: Back in Business*

prime video

(on-demand programming only)

1	*SpongeBob SquarePants*	6	*Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*
2	*PAW Patrol*	7	*Dora the Explorer*
3	*Blaze and the Monster Machines*	8	*Bubble Guppies*
4	*Peppa Pig*	9	*Wild Kratts*
5	*If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*	10	*Dino Dana*

hulu

1	*The Amazing World of Gumball*	6	*Blippi*
2	*Gravity Falls*	7	*Star vs. The Forces of Evil*
3	*Curious George (2006)*	8	*Doc McStuffins*
4	*Chowder*	9	*Ryan's World Specials*
5	*We Bare Bears*	10	*Yu-Gi-Oh!*

Source: Circana, Subscription Video Track (based on viewing hours in the US for the 12 months ending October 2024)

A leading advisor on the complexity of consumer behavior, **Circana** uses technology, advanced analytics, cross-industry data and deep expertise to help nearly 7,000 market-leading brands and retailers take action and unlock business growth.

madeinitaly.gov.it

Ministero degli Affari Esteri
e della Cooperazione Internazionale

ITA
ITALIAN TRADE AGENCY

San Diego, 9-12 February 2025

DON'T BUY IMPRESSIONS WHEN YOU CAN GET ENGAGEMENTS

Evelyn
Wooow!
WANNA PLAY A GAME?
Hmm..
Marketplace
Paths
Face Filters
Stickers
Originals
Premium
Angry Birds MakerSpace S3
Each week, you'll unlock something new and exciting. Just keep coming back to see what surprises await!
But first, let's take a quick look at what MakerSpace Season 3 has in store for us!
This season of MakerSpace is going to be a blast, and you'll get an exclusive sneak peek of Episode 1 in just a few days. Until then, let's reintroduce you to the characters you'll be seeing this season!

Stop wasting your marketing budget on ad impressions in unsafe platforms for kids. With Kinzoo Messenger, you get privacy-safe brand engagements that are high-intent and 100% opt-in — all in a platform trusted by parents.

KINZOO™

Family tech built by parents

Learn More at Kinzoo.com/For-Brands

or contact Daniel O'Sullivan at: Daniel@kinzoo.com

Annemie Gulickx, channel manager for Belgium-based Ketnet

A newly cast season of *#LikeMe* aims to replicate the popularity of the previous four, which 73% of the region's kids watched

The upcoming *Luce in the Lovely Land* is a Ketnet co-commission from La Cabane and Thuristar

Focusing on a young cancer survivor, tween series *Louise Lives Large* shows Ketnet's willingness to tackle tough issues

THE HOOKUP

Kidscreen checks in with new, established and evolving kids content buyers to find out what they're looking for right now.

BY: SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN

The VRT kids brand Ketnet has enjoyed a strong linear presence in Belgium since it launched in 1997. But digital is its sweet spot these days—specifically the Ketnet Junior preschool app and the Ketnet hub for six to 12s on streamer VRT MAX.

There are roughly 700,000 kids under age 13 in the Flanders region of Belgium, and Ketnet reaches 92% of them annually, attracting 60,000 unique daily visitors to its digital platforms on average, says channel manager Annemie Gulickx. "Ketnet is very values-driven, and it's important that we tell children everything that's happening in the world," she says. To her point, one of Ketnet's most popular shows is *Karrewiet*, an aged-down news program.

Relatability and a fearlessness about tackling tough issues underpin much of Ketnet's scripted programming. One example that will join the lineup in May is *Louise Lives Large* (eight x 24 minutes), a live-action series for tweens that follows a 13-year-old cancer survivor's bucket-list journey to do all the things she missed out on while she was ill. "There's no theme or issue we can't discuss, but we [strive to end] on a positive note," says Gulickx.

What is Ketnet looking for?

To compete with giants like Disney+ and Netflix, Ketnet is seeking a mix of pick-ups and commissions. Acquisitions for 10- to 12-year-olds can be subtitled, but anything targeted at a younger audience has to be dubbed into Flemish in order to promote the local language. "It's an extra investment we make with all acquisitions," Gulickx explains.

For tweens, Ketnet is looking for half-hour episodes with deeper storytelling. But snappy 10-minute eps are also welcome when it comes to light-hearted and YouTuber-inspired content like Ketnet's *Prank Squad* series.

Scripted live-action shows are popular with tween audiences, so the broadcaster usually invests more money in this category overall. Ketnet is looking for international co-pro opportunities, expecting to shoulder 35% of the budget or less. But this figure can go as high as 60% for homegrown content, since Ketnet is particularly hungry for stories that reflect children's lives in Flanders. "We also do a lot of animation co-pros," notes Gulickx. "We're a small part [of the overall financing], but we do a lot of them."

Upcoming releases

Gulickx is excited about the comeback of *#LikeMe*, a music-driven series for tweens that Ketnet ran for four seasons (52 x 26 minutes) from 2019 to 2023. It became a regional phenomenon that was watched by 73% of the four-to-12 demo, she says. A fifth season just launched in January, with an all-new cast taking over from the original characters (who have graduated from the series' high school), and this revamp should be a crucial test for the brand.

Preschool shows on the horizon include Blue Zoo's truck toon *Mojo Swoptops* (52 x 11 minutes) due out this year, and MIAM! Animation's *The Tinies* (52 x 11 minutes)—a DIY-themed comedy about toys in the attic coming to life that's set to premiere in Q1 2026. Ketnet has also co-commissioned La Cabane/Thuristar's *Luce in the Lovely Land* (39 x seven minutes), with a release date yet to be confirmed. k

MATTEL

Visit us at **Kidscreen**

Contact: content_sales@mattel.com

©2025 Mattel. ©2025 Gullane (Thomas) Limited. ©2025 Lyons Partnership, L.P.

Kingdom-building

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 plan is a gateway opportunity for kids brand owners to plant their flags in 21 new family entertainment centers that are currently under construction.

BY: COLE WATSON

Thrilling attractions, interactive exhibits, diverse shopping options and delicious food & beverage services form the backbone of a great theme park, but they also have the power to turn states and cities into top travel destinations. Prime tourist locations such as Florida, Tokyo and Rome all offer lessons to companies looking to create a range of branded experiences that stand the test of time, while also innovating enough to entice customers to return multiple times. But like Rome, these things aren't built in a day.

Achieving this level of prestige requires a heavy up-front investment from both builders and brand owners, but the payoff can be just as substantial. Themed entertainment ventures generate billions of dollars in revenue annually from families looking for everything from a day of fun to weeks of immersive experiences with their favorite characters and properties.

Could this concept of building a new tourism industry around theme parks, resorts and entertainment centers be repeated elsewhere? The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is certainly going to try.

The vision

Location-based entertainment (LBE) is a major pillar of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 program—a blueprint drafted by the kingdom to guide its ongoing economic transformation and steer all major investments, with the goal of creating a thriving economy and an empowered nation. Now in phase two, this plan has already seen the KSA's Public Investment Fund pour more than US$13 billion into its homegrown entertainment industry.

Heading up this initiative is the fund's Saudi Entertainment Ventures (SEVEN). Launched in 2018, this subsidiary is tasked with building, developing and operating 21 themed entertainment destinations in 14 cities across the KSA. And the call has gone out to licensors and kids brand owners that it's time to get in on the ground floor.

"[SEVEN] is now fully under construction in 14 different destinations," says chief attractions officer Damien Latham. "By the time we reach full scale, we'll be employing more than 25,000

SEVEN is investing upwards of US$13 billion to develop 21 family entertainment centers in Saudia Arabian cities including Riyadh, Tabuk, Al-Medinah and Yanbu

people across the portfolio, which will translate into tens of millions of Saudis enjoying a new genre of entertainment."

The KSA is a pretty untapped market on this front, with American/European leisure mainstays such as sports arenas, ski hills and aquariums only having started to make their way into the kingdom in the last decade, Latham notes. Theater chain AMC just opened its first location in the region six years ago, and there are now more than 80 in operation, thanks to the rampant demand from almost 37 million people for more domestic entertainment options.

Undertaking any construction project in an unfamiliar territory can be challenging, and Saudi Arabia is no exception. In particular, the treatment of migrant workers has been a hot topic in recent months, after an ITV documentary that aired in October brought renewed attention to the plight of migrant construction workers in Saudi Arabia.

Kingdom Uncovered: Inside Saudi Arabia alleges that since 2017, more than 21,000 foreign laborers have died and another 100,000-plus have gone missing while working on Vision 2030 projects and building the infrastructure and stadiums necessary for the kingdom to host the FIFA World Cup in 2034. Saudi authorities deny these claims and insist the kingdom's work-related fatality rate is among the lowest in the world.

Construction issues aside, Latham says another major hurdle the KSA is facing has to do with training and mentoring people for careers in the LBE sector. To meet this challenge head on, the Ministry of Tourism implemented new "Ahluha" training programs last year that are tailored to help individuals meet performance standards for a wide range of professions, including tour guides, travel agents, hotel workers and line cooks.

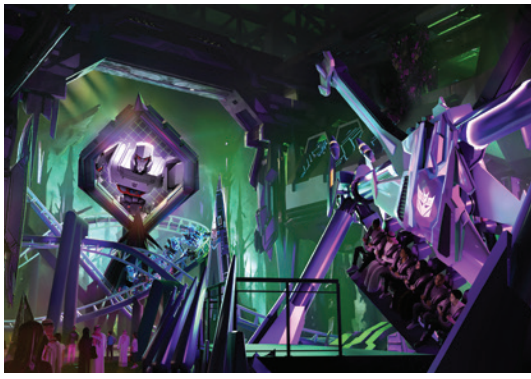
When SEVEN's 21 projects are complete, they will cover more than 64,000 square kilometers, with at least 25% of this space devoted to licensed kids brands, says Latham. To that end, the company has already signed deals with the likes of Warner Bros. Discovery and Toei Animation to bring their brands to life. Locations will also feature an equal number of proprietary IPs, stories and characters when they begin to open their gates towards the end of next year.

"I'm hoping that the model we've developed will become globally recognized very quickly, because we are not a theme park, and we are certainly not a shopping mall," says Latham. "Our projects are a carefully curated selection of LBEs with a beautiful public-realm space that knits it all together."

The opportunity

Major toycos Hasbro and Mattel have both been chomping at the bit to establish a market presence for their brands in the kingdom. In 2023, Hasbro announced two partnerships with SEVEN to build three Transformers attractions and seven Play-Doh entertainment centers within the next five years, featuring rides, play zones, exclusive merchandise and themed food & beverage options.

The discussions between Hasbro and SEVEN that led to these deals began as early as 2018, says Matt Proulx, the toyco's SVP of global experiences, partnerships and music. "One of the first elements we saw was how the KSA was hiring an amazing team of LBE



Hasbro has earmarked Transformers and Play-Doh as the perfect IPs to attract tourists into the KSA, while Mattel is focusing its initial efforts on developing Hot Wheels and Barbie branded experiences

professionals, and from there, began to build a great infrastructure that gave us the comfort that we could trust them with our brands."

Early on in this discovery process, both companies conducted research to determine which Hasbro brands would best resonate in the KSA, leveraging months of surveys and the toyco's performance data for its past LBE experiences to land on Transformers and Play-Doh as the best-positioned options for cultivating a family audience and attracting international tourism business.

Even without SEVEN's attractions firing on all cylinders yet, foreign tourist spending in Saudi Arabia reached a record high of US$39.95 billion in 2023—a 42.8% increase compared to 2022. In total, the KSA welcomed 109.3 million tourists last year, comprising 81.9 million domestic guests and 27.4 million foreign travellers—the most the country has ever seen.

Its initial goal was 100 million annual visitors by 2030, so this market sector is developing way ahead of schedule—in fact, it accounted for 7% of the country's total GDP in 2023. A new target of 150 million tourists a year by 2030 has recently been set.

"There is a huge population boom in the younger demographics, which is really important not only to Hasbro, but to the entire family attraction industry," says Proulx. "Between 60% and 65% of the entire population in the KSA is below the age of 35."

The region's young families thrive on experiences and travel, making them a core target for many of Hasbro's LBE businesses, Proulx explains. And better yet, these parents are willing to spend a lot of money to entertain their kids.

The KSA's Vision 2030 program has helped the country develop a strong family-oriented culture in recent years, making it an emerging global hub for branded entertainment, says Julie Freeland, Mattel's senior director of global live events and attractions. "We knew we had to be part of this journey. This is a market that's eager for innovative, family-friendly experiences, and we've already seen strong fan engagement for our brands in the [Middle East]."

Mattel's partnership with SEVEN will include the creation of Hot Wheels e-karting tracks in Riyadh, Makkah, Taif, Al-Madinah, Tabuk and Jazan in the coming years. Inspired by the toyco's Hot Wheels City Experience in São Paulo, Brazil, these new attractions will boast many of the same features, including a multi-tiered race track and a dedicated retail area where families can purchase exclusive toy vehicles and merchandise.

In the last five years, Mattel has been making plenty of experiential moves in the Middle East to engage new generations of fans with its brands, says Freeland. In 2024 alone, the toyco launched the World of Barbie exhibit in Riyadh, sent *Hot Wheels Monster Trucks Live!* to Abu Dhabi and Kuwait City, and opened a flagship Mission: Play! FEC in Abu Dhabi.

Freeland says trusting local licensees that know the region and its consumers best is critical to the success of ventures like these. This allows Mattel to smoothly navigate local regulations and on-the-ground logistics, and gives the company an opportunity to tailor its activations to resonate with families.

"Our local partners contribute deep market knowledge and operational expertise, helping us shape experiences that really connect with Saudi families," says Freeland. "It's truly a collaborative effort—blending Mattel's creative vision with our partners' ability to execute seamlessly within the region. Together, we're delivering immersive attractions that excite fans and set new benchmarks for family entertainment in Saudi Arabia." k

© Armorsaurs, ARMORSAURS™ is a trademark of Daewon used under license in the U.S. and other countries. All logos, names, characters, likenesses, images, slogans,and packaging appearance are the property of Daewon and MGA unless otherwise stated. All are based on the animated entertainment property "Armored Saurus" which is the sole property of Daewon and used under license.

The LEGO Group recreated the legendary FW14B 1992 F1 World Championship car from Williams Racing as a 799-piece set

Off to the races

After four years of growth, Formula 1 is roaring into toy aisles with Mattel and the LEGO Group revving up its program as anchor licensees.

BY: COLE WATSON

The engine roars, causing a wave of excitement in the stuffed-animal crowd on the sidelines of the custom-built track. The green light blinks and the race is on, with toy cars putting the pedal to the metal to stay the course and cross the finish line first—if they don't hit the bedroom wall, that is.

Miniature cars are one of the most popular product categories in toy history, and it's easy to see why they've stood the test of time—their inherent play pattern, combined with a child's imagination, captures the thrill of race day on a smaller scale.

Throughout the years, all manner of licensed vehicles—from auto racing brands including Nascar (stock cars) and IndyCar (open-wheeled), to motorcycle racing series such as MotoGP and events like monster truck shows—have spent time in the spotlight. And the next league primed for a major consumer products push is Formula 1.

Since Liberty Media acquired it in 2017, Formula One Group has turbo-charged its efforts to build a bigger fanbase, and that's been paying off big time. At last count, more than 700 million motorsports enthusiasts worldwide attended or tuned in to watch F1's Grand Prix events in 2024—and now the organization is looking to translate this massive reach and engagement into new toy licensing opportunities.

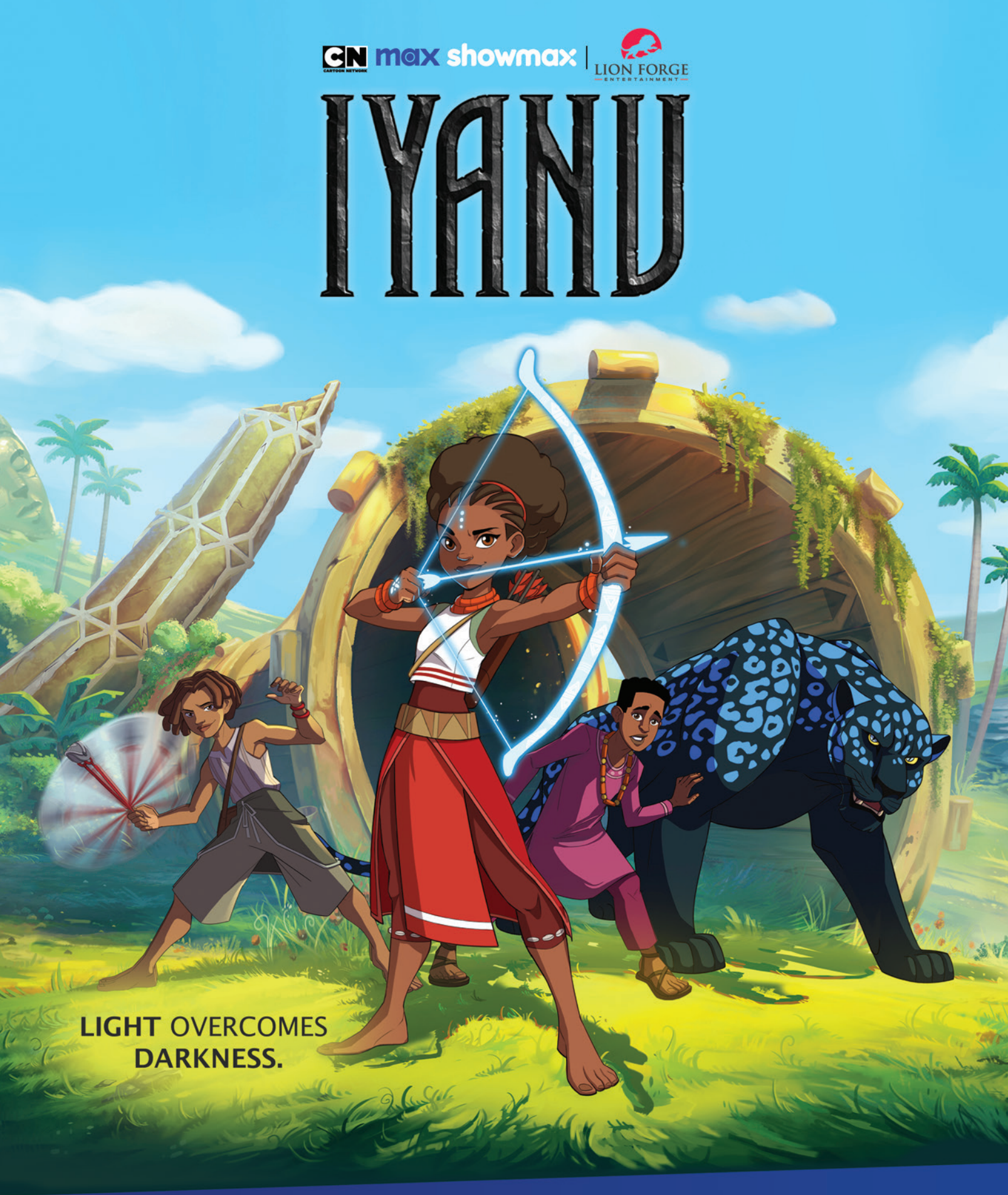
"We've tried to open the sport up to all ages in recent years with different ways to consume [F1], whether it's through [our docuseries such as] *Drive to Survive* or an enhanced social media strategy," says chief commercial officer Emily Prazer. "Data shows that F1 is continuing to reach younger fans, with over 50% of followers on TikTok and 40% of followers on Instagram under age 25. There's also the fact that the drivers on the grid are younger than ever before, [so young] fans are now [interested in them] more than we've seen in the past."

In addition to sold-out Grand Prix events, record crowds and growing audience engagement on social platforms, Prazer points to a noteworthy statistic: One in three fans started following F1 in the last five years. And breaking the demographics down further, 42% of the league's fanbase is now female, and one-third of its TV viewers are younger than 35 (an increase of 144% compared to 2018, according to Prazer).

This aging-down shift has inspired the 75-year-old F1 brand to expand beyond the real-life racetrack by signing global toy partnerships with Mattel, the LEGO Group and Topps that will form the backbone of a consumer products range featuring a mix of new licensed vehicles, construction sets and trading cards targeting kids and families. And while individual racing teams have previously signed their own licensing deals with these toycos, F1's umbrella strategy will bring all of them together in a single product mix for the first time.

Licensing is projected to play a pivotal role in driving new growth for F1 in the coming years, so the organization is on the hunt for more strategic licensees that can help move the brand into new categories, says Prazer.

"There are huge opportunities with this demographic, as it's a relatively untapped market within Formula 1. Targeting a younger audience enables us to grow our fandom, allows families to enjoy the sport together,


CN CARTOON NETWORK max showmax | LION FORGE ENTERTAINMENT
IYANU
LIGHT OVERCOMES DARKNESS.
26x22' | SALES@LIONFORGE.COM

LEGO's new F1 sets feature all of the vehicles and accessories needed for kids to build their own Grand Prix races at home

F1 and Mattel teamed up to create their first-ever toy car together, a Mattel Creations exclusive

and creates generational loyalty. More diverse audience engagement means that fans can start at a younger age, and these upcoming products can cultivate a lifelong passion for the sport."

Wheels in motion

After jumping on board in October as one of the key partners in the league's kids push, Mattel is gearing up to roll out a full range of F1-branded Hot Wheels vehicles and playsets to retailers in 150 countries this year. And while the toyco has worked with individual F1 teams including McLaren, Ferrari, Mercedes-AMG and Aston Martin Aramco over the past couple of decades, this new line will mark the first time all 10 teams are represented under the Hot Wheels banner.

"This multi-year partnership was the result of ongoing conversations about combining Hot Wheels' approach to collectibles and F1's thrilling motorsport appeal," says Roberto Stanichi, EVP of Hot Wheels and global head of vehicles & building sets. "Both brands share a commitment to precision, speed and engagement, making this an exciting venture for us to bring the F1 fandom to [Hot Wheels]."

Consumers are demanding more realism and authenticity in the vehicles category these days, Stanichi notes, adding that Mattel plans to meet this challenge by replicating key F1 elements, from car sponsors to race-track gates and podiums.

While the full product lineup is still under wraps, Mattel celebrated its new F1 partnership in October by launching a Hot Wheels-sponsored F1 toy car on its Mattel Creations e-commerce site. This limited-time item sold out within the first week, showcasing the fandom's rampant demand for licensed toys. Mattel will run another online pre-order in June for fans who missed out the first time around. (This car comes with three sets of interchangeable Pirelli tires, a full-metal chassis and an original F1-inspired deco).

"Mattel Creations is a unique platform for our most passionate fans, and launching our first Hot Wheels F1 die-cast car there allowed us to connect directly with young collectors who appreciate the exclusivity and craftsmanship of our products," says Stanichi. "The response has been phenomenal, and fans were eager to get their hands on a piece of F1 history in Hot Wheels form."

As part of its F1 agreement, Mattel has also launched a new platform called Hot Wheels Challenge Accepted in partnership with California-based e-learning firm Mindset Works, which focuses on using the power of play and educational toys to help kids develop a growth mindset, embrace challenges, learn from criticism and find inspiration in others. In addition to developing new products, the Hot Wheels platform will also appear at select F1 Grand Prix events throughout the year as part of fan zone activities featuring seven-time F1 champion Sir Lewis Hamilton, plus Hot Wheels physics lessons and toy-building challenges.

Hitting the bricks

The LEGO Group will roll out 17 new F1-branded construction sets for all ages in Q1, including a first LEGO Duplo set (targeting preschoolers) and six new LEGO City bundles (for kids ages six and up). And for older builders and collectors, 10 LEGO Speed Champions are poised to hit retail in March, recreating the 2025 signature vehicle of each F1 team in brick form.

The Danish brickmaker's multi-year deal with F1 took two years to finalize because the partners were committed to setting up a lofty collaboration to create a new line of products geared towards igniting a passion for engineering and speed in young builders, says global head of product Lucas Reynoso Vizcaino.

The LEGO Group built up anticipation for these products in November, when it unveiled its F1 SKUs at the second Las Vegas Grand Prix—a three-day event that attracted more than 306,000 live spectators (according to F1 officials) and an American TV audience of 905,000.

In the same vein as Mattel, LEGO will also offer fan-zone activations throughout the year, letting kids and families build its brick sets while learning about F1's long and storied history.

"This partnership is all about connecting more LEGO fans with the world of Formula 1, bringing together two passionate global fan-bases," says Vizcaino. "Kids will get to dive deeper into the thrill of top-speed racing as they recreate exciting moments and icons from the racetrack, pit lane and garages in brick form—offering them a new opportunity to experience the complexities of elite motorsports." k

INDIGRAMS
26 x 11
New season
coming in 2025
Landslide
entertainment
CANADA
MEDIA FUND
CREATIVE
SASKATCHEWAN
aptn
MISSINIPI
BROADCASTING CORPORATION
For more information, please contact: bouganin@landslide-ent.com

Papers, please

The EU is pushing the licensing industry to be more transparent and accountable for its environmental impact with the introduction of digital product passports.

BY: COLE WATSON

After rolling the dice on an early DPP for Products of Change, UK consultancy Fabacus is now helping Hasbro, Activision Blizzard, Paramount Global and Ubisoft do the same

Passports identify people, proclaiming their country of origin so customs and border officials know who is attempting to gain entry into their countries. But starting in 2028, consumer products heading in and out of Europe will require their own version of a passport so consumers know what they're getting.

On July 18, 2024, the European Union adopted the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR), a new framework for sustainable design requirements in consumer products (excluding food and medicine). As part of this legislation, each item imported into or manufactured in the EU will soon require a digital product passport in the form of a QR code that proves the product is legitimate, and provides consumers with information like how and where it was produced and what its carbon footprint looks like.

Green movement

Both of these initiatives are part of a wider European Green Deal that was approved by the EU in 2020. The overarching goal is to make Europe a net-zero emitter of greenhouse gases by 2050 through regulating industries such as farming, biodiversity and building renovations, and promoting a circular economy that reuses, refurbishes and recycles resources.

The first working draft of this ESPR plan is expected to be ready by the end of Q2 2025, and it will outline all of the mandated data for building a DPP in each product category. Early iterations have listed several requirements that both licensors and manufacturers must provide for products aimed at kids, including toys, games and apparel. These specs include information about product composition, sustainability, repair instructions and recycling.

The Green Deal's policies are ushering in a transformative era of transparency and accountability for the consumer products industry, says Helena Mansell-Stopher, CEO and founder of the sustainable nonprofit organization Products of Change (POC).

"DPPs are meant to communicate to consumers the environmental impact of a product, but the core challenge comes when a majority of companies don't have that information or know who's responsible for delivering it to them up the value chain," she says. "There's no existing infrastructure or systems in place to collect data at this scope; everyone is essentially starting from scratch."

These new laws will impact all parts of the supply chain, from where factories source their materials, to retailer liability for selling products that aren't compliant with ESPR standards. In particular, toycos will need to outline the full life cycle of each product, including putting infrastructure in place to recycle, reuse or resell used goods.

Failure to include this info will result in licensed manufacturers being taxed. Under the Extended Producer Responsibility legislation, companies are required to report their total waste from electrical/electronic equipment, packaging and single-use plastics twice a year—and each product's creator is now responsible for 100% of the net costs for collecting and treating this waste, instead of sharing the responsibility with each link in the supply chain.

"These aren't even all of the regulations getting moved forward," says Mansell-Stopher. "There are almost 60 pieces of legislation that will hit the global consumer products industry by 2030, and most of them will come into effect in 2026."

Filing in the gaps

Products of Change developed one of the first digital passports in November 2023, partnering with English ceramic manufacturer Pure Table Top to design a new mug for its POC Sustainability Conference in

JUNIOR STARTUP
SMART SHOW FOR SMART KIDS
2D / 52 X 11' / Kids 8-12
BRAND NEW SERIES
Disney INDIA
prime video INDIA
WORLD WIDE RIGHTS AVAILABLE

All Rights Available
Mighty little Bheem
SEASON 4
COMING SOON
20 X 5'/CGi
PRE-SCHOOL
SEASON 1, 2, 3
NETFLIX
See You at
kidscreen
Reach us at sales@greengold.tv
SCAN ME!
GREEN GOLD
Animation Pvt Ltd
www.greengold.tv
20
Glorious
years of
Animation
Production
All Rights Available
Brand New
PRE-SCHOOL SHOW
Toe-Tapping songs
SING WITH BHEEM
40 x 3'/CGi

London. By scanning the QR code attached to the price tag or the bottom of the mug itself, readers can see the product's full manufacturing journey, including which factory in China assembled all of the pieces, and a complete carbon-footprint report—right down to its specific tariff codes and certificates.

But POC and Pure Table couldn't pull this off alone. Early on in production, the partners teamed up with Amsterdam-based impact measurement firm Dayrize and UK data consultancy Fabacus to construct the mug's DPP together.

Dayrize CEO Austin Simms says the experience was a great way to show conference attendees the data-collection process and demonstrate how Dayrize's AI-powered tools can help toycos and game developers begin to create an internal sustainability database.

"There's just a natural symbiotic relationship between Fabacus and us, because they get the product data from the company, and then our tool turns that data into impact information," Simms explains. "So now, you've actually got not just the story about the product and where it's been, but where it will be at each stage of its life cycle."

Simms adds that every organization Dayrize works with—including Google and the Retail Council of Canada—is missing data in its supply chain, which means his firm has to collect as much info as possible from a company, and then leverage Dayrize's internal data spanning more than 30 million SKUs to fill in the missing gaps.

Even digital products like video games from major developers like Ubisoft and Activision Blizzard will need DPPs to track each title's carbon footprint and energy consumption

For example, Simms says Dayrize's software can accurately assess the environmental impact of a kids graphic hoodie just by knowing that its 200 grams of cotton came from Bangladesh. The tool can then predict which factory produced it and how much energy was used to process the cotton into a new garment. This results in a rating of how much energy was generated from fossil fuels versus solar.

"Tools like this are really important to companies, because if we had to wait for everyone to have perfect data, no one would be able to do a digital product passport" or include data from five years back or more in the mandatory reports, says Simms.

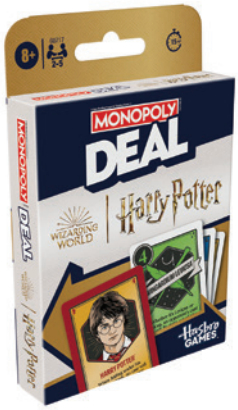
He adds that today's sustainability talking points—such as packaging and last-mile delivery—only account for 10% of a product's overall impact on the environment. In reality, this impact starts far earlier, when decisions are made about things such as material type and how many design iterations are needed prior to full production.

Once Fabacus has collected all of that impact data, it assembles the pieces into a DPP. And while this technology is at an early stage of development until mandates are ironed out, partners such as Hasbro, Activision Blizzard, Paramount Global and Ubisoft are quickly jumping on board with multi-year deals to ensure their business operations are compliant and as up-to-date as possible.

An added benefit of adopting DPPs is that digital verification and traceable data points can serve as a first line of defense against counterfeit products, which cost the global industry US$2 trillion a year, says Fabacus founder and CEO Andrew Xeni.

While the system is not yet fully developed, DPPs can also be paired with additional applications like near-field communication technology to improve effectiveness and mitigate the risk of consumers getting taken in by counterfeit goods at retail or fraudulent listings online.

"This is important for brands with high IP value because counterfeiting dilutes brand value and can raise safety and quality concerns, particularly in the toy industry," says Xeni. "As more companies see the value of DPPs in connecting with consumers and regulators, demand for digital transparency tools in this sector is likely to expand, shaping how brands manage and report on their product ecosystems." K



DPPs will catalogue every element of Hasbro's game-making process, from the specific types of trees used to source paper, to the factory used to assemble the complete package

Discover Animation Excellence in Ireland

Fís Éireann
Screen Ireland

Enterprise Ireland

ANIMATION IRELAND

NORTHERN IRELAND screen

Find out more:

screenireland.ie

enterprise-ireland.com

animationireland.com

northernirelandscreen.co.uk

K is for kindness

Kindness among children is trending downwards, but parents still see it as a crucial trait.

BY: KIM FOULDS & JILL CRANE

Kindness is a powerful tool. Being kind boosts our well-being and overall happiness, strengthens our connections with others, and improves our sense of belonging.[1]

Kindness goes a long way for others, too. Research shows that we underestimate the impact of our small acts of kindness on the people around us.

Children's media has the power to portray kindness in a holistic way—to model what it means to be kind, and to show how meaningful small acts of kindness can be for everyone involved. And the need for this type of modeling is more important than ever.

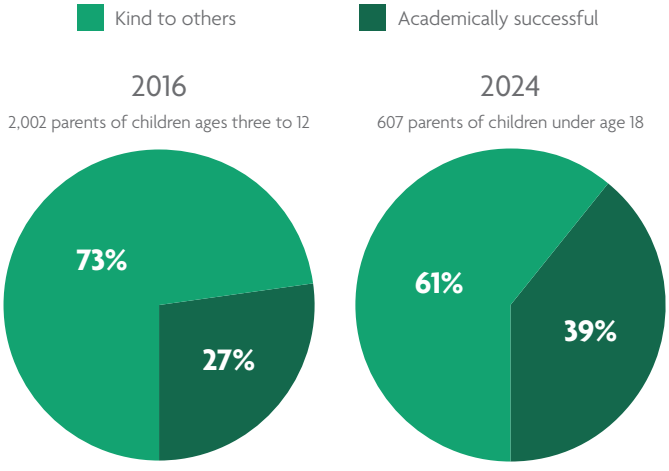
In 2016, Sesame Workshop asked parents in the US about kindness in response to concerns that the world seemed to be lacking in empathy and worries about the long-term effects on children and their communities. The findings confirmed our fears: While more than half of the parents we surveyed (55%) said they believe kindness is a priority to most people, two-thirds (64%) said they do not think people go out of their way to help others, and most (70%) were worried about their children living in an unkind world.

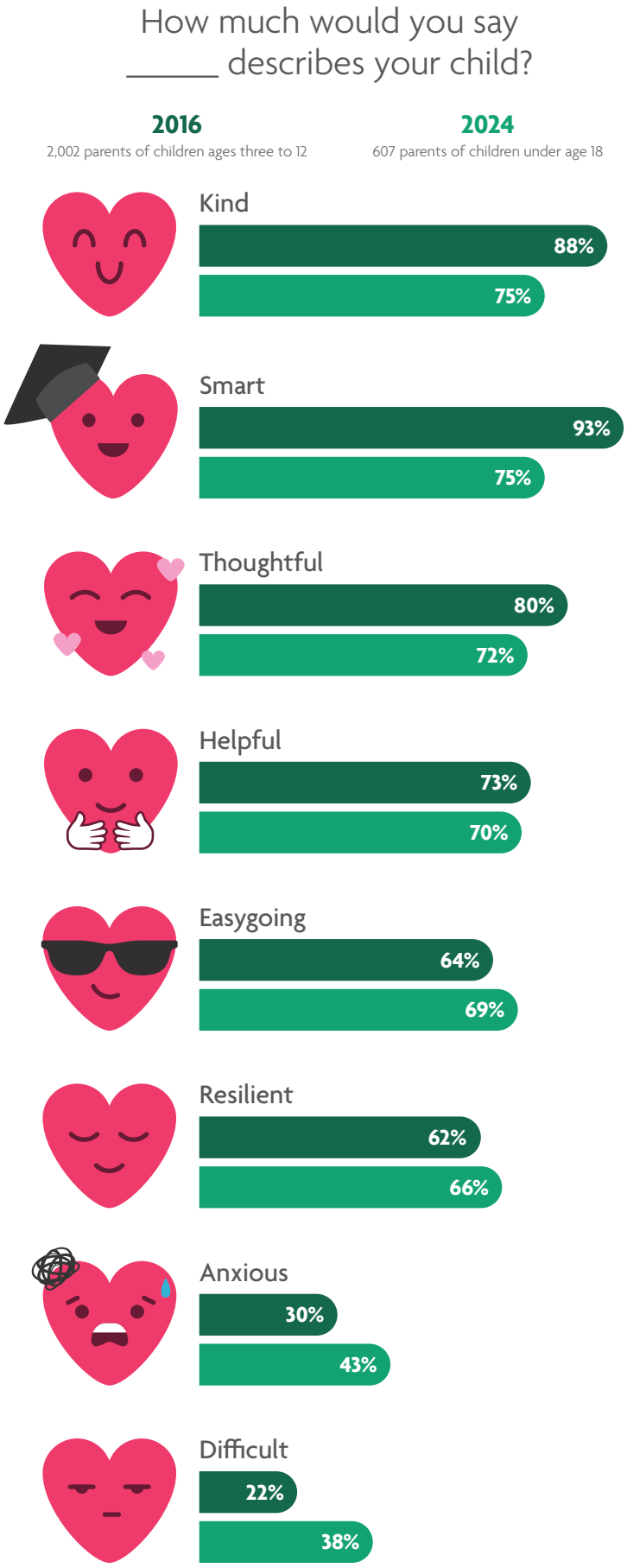
Parents agreed that kindness is important and should be taught first at home, but they also expressed the belief that tools are not required to teach kindness because, to them, kindness is common sense. In addition, all of the parents we surveyed in 2016 said they do a good job of modeling and teaching kindness to their own children, but that other parents fall short of that mark. And as a result, the majority of parents (54%) said they consider their children to be kinder than most kids the same age.

The power of kindness might explain why an early 2024 social media post in which Elmo asked, "How is everybody doing?" elicited such a huge reaction. His small act of kindness—checking in—struck a chord with people around the world, and the response was clear: People are struggling.

Considering this response, we wanted to circle back to parents to get a sense of the current state of kindness eight years after our initial study. In 2024, we saw that much of what gave us pause in 2016 is still concerning parents today. The patterns remain the same—nearly

Which is more important for your child to be at their current age?





all parents we surveyed believe in the power of kindness and see it as the most important element of a child's well-being. However, they are still worried that the world is an unkind place for children. And although nearly all parents report practicing kindness themselves, they think the average person is not kind.

While the pattern of findings on kindness between 2016 and 2024 mirror each other, we also uncovered some important differences.

For example, we saw shifts in how parents described their children. While 88% of parents said "kind" described their child in 2016, that number dropped to 75% in 2024. We saw reductions in kind behaviors such as being thoughtful and helpful, too, but there were upticks in describing children as resilient (62% vs. 66%), anxious (30% vs. 43%) and difficult (22% vs. 38%).

There is reason for hope, however. Our 2024 study found that promoting kindness and resilience is still viewed as critical by US parents: 87% believe it's important for society to promote kindness, with 45% saying it's extremely important. And most parents report that both their child's and their own personal well-being would improve in a kinder world.

In a similar vein, 88% of parents agree that their children's well-being would improve if they had tools to be more resilient. In fact, resilience is important to almost all parents, with 90% agreeing that fostering it in children has a positive ripple effect, spreading strength and courage throughout communities.

Parents know the value of kindness and want their children to live in a kinder world, and there is a demand for resources that leverage the power of kindness (85%). Knowing what it can do for personal and community well-being, there is also a need for content that elevates the importance of kindness to help both children and parents thrive in a kinder world (84%).

As educational media continues to evolve to ensure we are meeting the needs of children today, we have an important opportunity and responsibility to meet this moment and continue to create content for kids and families that helps build a kinder society.

[1] Hui, B. P. H., Ng, J. C. K., Berzaghi, E., Cunningham-Amos, L. A., & Kogan, A. (2020). "Rewards of kindness? A meta-analysis of the link between prosociality and well-being." *Psychological Bulletin*, 146(12). doi.org/10.1037/bul0000298

[2] Kumar, A., & Epley, N. (2023). "A little good goes an unexpectedly long way: Underestimating the positive impact of kindness on recipients." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 152(1). doi.org/10.1037/xge0001271

KIM FOULDS is VP of content research and evaluation at Sesame Workshop, and oversees these aspects of co-productions and community engagement initiatives around the world.

As VP of consumer insights, **JILL CRANE** heads up brand, consumer and syndicated market research globally, as well as audience/media analytics.

A world apart

Brands like Miraculous, Hello Kitty, Care Bears and L.O.L. Surprise! have moved into the open-world game *PK XD*, jumping on an untapped fan engagement opportunity in a less cluttered space.

BY: RYAN TUCHOW

Brazilian game developer Afterverse's social game *PK XD* is ripe for partnerships, giving brands an opportunity to connect with roughly 50 million kids in the gaming market on a less saturated platform.

Aimed at the nine and up crowd, *PK XD* (short for *PlayKids Xtreme Digital*) is a five-year-old open-world multiplayer game that's available on PCs and smartphones. It encompasses a neighborhood, shops, a playground (complete with a stage and rides) and portals to mini-games. Players can explore these areas, build and decorate houses for others to visit and rate, and play social mini-games including a car racing experience and an obstacle course.

The game is monetized through advertising (kids educational brands Homer and Kiddopia are two current clients) and the sale of in-game accessories and real-world products including home goods.

Child's play

The *PK XD* universe has been growing steadily, with more than a billion installs and 150 billion minutes of play time to date, says Afterverse CEO Charles Barros. It's currently available in 14 countries, including the US, Canada, France, Brazil and Mexico.

This kind of reach has already lured several major kids brands into the *PK XD* virtual world—such as Sanrio, which has created a range of Hello Kitty decor for players' homes, as well as ringing in the brand's 50th anniversary in November 2024 with a giant Hello Kitty-branded ferris wheel for players to ride and a branded character kids can talk to in the game.

Afterverse has also forged partnerships with MGA Entertainment (L.O.L. Surprise! outfits and home decor), Cloudco (Care Bears pets and outfits) and Miraculous Corp (a maze mini-game based on *Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir*). These early collabs have proven to be quite successful—players spent more than 350 million minutes in *PK XD*'s Miraculous mini-game during its eight-week run, and the Hello Kitty campaign racked up 150 million views in its first two weeks.

Usually running for three weeks, integrations tend to generate more than 200 million minutes of engagement, notes Barros.

A Miraculous experience

For Miraculous Corp, planting a mini-game in *PK XD* was a way to build awareness for the series in multiple regions, on a fun and safe platform where kids can only communicate using phrases provided in the game. There was high demand from *PK XD* users, who had been clamoring to see the Miraculous brand appear in the game, says Elinor Schops, VP of gaming experience at Miraculous Corp. "It offers Miraculous fans a unique opportunity to connect with a global community, engage in cultural exchanges, and enjoy immersive role-playing experiences using the platform's versatile tools."

Miraculous has done a total of four content drops since it started working with Afterverse in 2023. These include character interactions, mini-games and a Parisian simulation in the game world. So far, all of these activations have been successful, with key performance indicators showing strong results.

During the first six weeks of the initial integration, Miraculous's mini-games racked up 73 million plays and more than 250 million minutes of playtime. And the follow-up effort did even better, with 120 million plays and 350 million minutes over eight weeks.

Part of *PK XD*'s appeal to brand owners is the prospect of less in-game competition than on Roblox, which is home to an estimated 40 million games (both licensed and unofficial fan-made titles).

Creating games in more cluttered spaces like Roblox can be a challenging,

Big-name brands including Hello Kitty and Miraculous (below) are using *PK XD*'s less-cluttered platform to reach more young players and fans

time-consuming and expensive way to attract and retain users, adds Barros. And the chances of being discovered with so much content competing for attention are a lot slimmer.

But *PK XD* integrates brand activations directly into its world, where its entire player base resides. "This approach provides our partners with immediate and substantial exposure to all of our users, enabling them to achieve higher KPIs than on other platforms—delivering results from day one with less effort and cost," says Barros.

And another point of difference is that Afterverse offers partners more effective engagement measurement data, compared to the limited information they are able to glean from TV and streaming launches.

Miraculous Corps' Schops sees *PK XD* as an emerging market that offers a "blue ocean" opportunity (as opposed to a "red ocean" space that's oversaturated with brands fighting for the same eyeballs). She adds that the game was especially attractive to Miraculous because of its popularity across North America and Latin America—two markets where the brand performs particularly well.

Open for business

Originally developed by PlayKids, *PK XD* was designed to provide kids aging out of the PlayKids app with a safe social world. The game's growth was accelerated by the pandemic, when kids flocked to online spaces where they could relax and hang out—and that motivated PlayKids to set up *PK XD* operations under a new company called Afterverse. (When Sandbox bought PlayKids in 2022, Afterverse became a separate company under the umbrella of Brazilian techco Movile Group.)

The game has since expanded to include a creator program for YouTubers with more than 5,000 subscribers. Any *PK XD*-focused videos they make are featured in the game and on its social channels, plus these influencers get in-game currency and can access an ad-free version of the game. Brazilian YouTubers Peter Toys (2.2 million subscribers) and Sophie (736,000 subscribers) have both joined this program recently, drawing more attention to the game and using it to build out their fanbases.

But *PK XD*'s digital bread-and-butter is partnerships with kids brands, consumer product brands and TV shows. And the platform is looking to cut more integration deals in order to improve its user experience and attract new players, says Barros. k

The kids industry's trusted newshound.

More than 14,000 subscribers worldwide
read *Kidscreen Daily* to stay informed.
To reach this engaged audience...

BOOK YOUR AD NOW!

kidscreen daily

Email sales@kidscreen.com to explore your options.

The future is here

As many great writers have pointed out, change tends to happen slowly, then all at once. And in the case of the kids entertainment industry, it looks like the tipping point has arrived.

Weathering the current market downturn means closing financing gaps while continuing to produce top-notch content, build audiences and establish brands—all of which require creativity and perseverance. This special report examines the benefits and complexities of co-pro treaties, the ROI of AI, and the alternative of mission-based content. With so many opportunities to carve a path through the challenges, the future is looking bright.

In this rapidly shifting landscape, the strong may survive, but companies that are courageous and willing to embrace change will triumph.

The tech elephant in the room

AI tools are here, with all their hype and promise. But what does that mean for content creators?

BY: BRENDAN CHRISTIE

In 2024, Microsoft commissioned IDC Custom Solutions to put some numbers against the ROI of artificial intelligence. The resulting report, titled *The Business Opportunity of AI*, offers some remarkable insights, including the rapid expansion of generative AI adoption: 75% of respondents said they were using the tech, up from 55% the year before. And about 92% of AI users surveyed said the technology had increased their productivity. But more importantly, for every dollar a company invests in generative AI, the ROI is US$3.7—and that number jumps to US$10.3 for market leaders.

For any industry under economic pressure—including the kids entertainment business—numbers like that just can't be easily ignored. But what difference can AI make for kids producers?

"We've hit the point of maturity over hype when it comes to AI," explains Tom Box, co-founder and co-MD of London-based Blue Zoo Animation Studio. "When you get to be a company of nearly 400 people, it becomes very hard to not be strangled by that weight. Using AI in meaningful and ethical ways allows us to unpick that [complexity]."

Blue Zoo primarily uses AI tools to code, research and better communicate internally. "On the coding side, ChatGTP does mediocre very well," says Box. "It's helping our animators to be mediocre programmers by asking ChatGTP to write them a quick script. It's not replacing expert coders, but it's allowing everyone to step up and help, which improves workflows." He adds that the platform is also useful "as a second brain to attack blank-page syndrome."

In addition to ChatGPT, the Blue Zoo team frequently turns to Anthropic's Claude AI—a similar platform that is better at creative writing and coding—but Blue Zoo has found the biggest benefits in creating its own bespoke chat tools, says Box.

"We haven't been using too many off-the-shelf AI tools because most haven't passed the gimmick test," he explains. "We've reverted to just using more raw LLMs (large language models), and that's what our own tools are using. One of the biggest problems we have with being a largely remote company is with communication—that water-cooler chat where ideas were shared. We're currently building a tool that will allow us to communicate via a chat tool built into our intranet."

For LLMs, Blue Zoo has been using Llama by Meta AI because it's trained using publicly available data, and it's transparent about its energy use (primarily relying on renewable energy). Box says it's worth the investment for Blue Zoo to build its own communications tools rather than use off-the-shelf products because bespoke tools allow the team to maintain control of its data (and combine data from multiple sources), avoid vendor lock-in, expand team knowledge and help the company manage its energy/emissions footprint.

While Blue Zoo and other animation studios are taking advantage of the more functional aspects of AI, some are already going a step farther and introducing AI into their production pipelines.

Nick Dorra, CEO and producer at Helsinki-based studio Haruworks, recently co-founded a consultancy called AI Animation to help media companies understand and use the tech. His clients include animation studio Dog Ears (*Puffin Rock*) in Northern Ireland and Finland's public broadcaster YLE.

For Dorra, it's all about finding efficiencies in the production flow. "Hybrid pipelines aren't the future—they're already here," he notes. "You might be doing some sequences or some parts of the workflow as you used to. You might have segments where it just makes sense to use these tools, where the tech can take you 80% or 90% of the way before you need to put on your working gloves and actually step in.

"It's gotten to a place where it's not just putting together a mood board with one of these tools; it's about how we build a hybrid pipeline that really works for production."

He estimates that workflows incorporating AI can realize anywhere between 20% to 80% in efficiencies—but there's a caveat. "Most of these tools are really good at doing one thing amazingly well, but then they might be completely crap at the neighboring task."

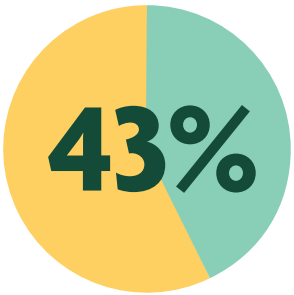
It's not so much about learning a particular tool. It's more about forming an understanding of how they work and what drives them. "If you go with off-the-shelf tools, to a degree you're still building a bespoke pipeline for each project," Dorra notes. "It's really just a matter of how broad your toolkit is, and how creative you are at solving the problems you encounter. But that's just production—you're solving problems."

One example of a workflow might see a creator doing the first couple of rounds of ideation with Midjourney, Adobe Firefly or something similar. Then that data could get fed into Cascadeur—a standalone character animation tool that turns video frames into 3D animation—or Wonder Studio AI, which automates 80% to 90% of "objective" VFX work (including motion-capturing actors' performances and transferring their movements to animated characters), leaving the artist to complete the remaining "subjective" work, which can then be imported into the studio's software.

For every $1 a company invests in generative AI, **the return on investment is $3.7.**

Generative AI usage jumped from **55%** in 2023 to **75%** in 2024.

Within 24 months, most organizations plan to expand beyond pre-built AI solutions to **advance AI workloads** that are customized or custom-built.



Almost half of market-leading companies using generative AI say **productivity use-cases** have provided the greatest ROI.

Source: IDC InfoBrief, November 2024

Exploring the industry's role in determining the future of AI.

Producer, showrunner and consultant Evan Baily takes a philosophical approach to the ongoing AI revolution. "My broader stance on these tools is that we didn't ask for them, but we're getting them anyway," he says. "And if we care about storytelling and filmmaking, we have a responsibility to use them, try them and understand them. Otherwise, how they get deployed—because they are going to get deployed—will be decided by people who don't necessarily care about filmmaking and storytelling."

For Baily, the creative process is a collaboration that capitalizes on the unexpected and unplanned. And while AI can be useful in delivering efficiencies, he doesn't want to see the tech become so ubiquitous that it entirely eliminates serendipitous outcomes.

"For me, one of the great joys of the creative process is giving direction to a writer or an artist, turning them loose, and having them come back with something that's not at all what I would have expected," he explains. "Those slippages in the process between humans are a feature, not a bug. What's lost when you lose that? I wouldn't give an actor a line-read before their first take. I want to hear it their way, because their way may be so much better. Their way has intrinsic value. Does an AI have 'a way'? If it does, it's not a way that's rooted in life experiences, convictions, vulnerabilities or frailties."

While he recognizes its limitations, Baily is also an advocate for the technology's unimaginable potential when it comes to driving content creation. "AI is not an advancement in film and television production technology. It's not a technical innovation in production. It is a change to civilization. A three-year-old in 2025 will never know a world without intelligent machines that are functionally as smart as we are. Growing up in that world, what are they going to want in stories? They're going to have completely different expectations. We're going to be making stuff we can't even dream about." —Brendan Christie

"Maybe we can find efficiencies of 20% or 30% and get a show into production that otherwise might never get made," says Dorra. "Maybe we can improve your margins a little bit—because I know from being an indie producer that everybody has stories about having a show with 70% or 80% of the financing, but just not being able to find the rest. Or you might be a producer with no money who can now develop a concept and pitch it. It's really not black and white."

For Evan Baily, a New York-based TV/film producer, showrunner and consultant, there's a clear delineation in the tools currently available. "There's a broad divide between AI tools that create a hard-baked finished product versus those that create data that can be an input into a process, but a human can get in there and knead the dough."

The industry hasn't quite reached the point of being able to meaningfully integrate generative AI into production workflows in terms of shots that can be used in a finished project, says Baily. There are nagging issues with things like consistency of character likenesses and revisability—not being able to give the tools notes and have them make small changes to content, versus completely regenerating it from scratch.

But we're close, Baily is quick to point out, flagging the recent announcement of text-to-video generator Meta Movie Gen as a tool that may address some of the issues with editing. Then there are generative tools like Runway's Gen-3 Alpha (capable of creating 10-second video clips when prompted with text, image or video) or two new tools from TikTok parentco ByteDance—PixelDance and Seaweed (AI video-generation tools that show promise in multi-character interactions)—but some of these are still more hype than reality.

Right now, Baily sees the most value in tools that simplify the process. As an example, he recounts a recent experience with ScriptSense, a software package from Jumpcut that, among other things, finds efficiencies in scripts. "I used it last October for a script I developed. It did a really smart job of telling me how the budget could be lowered by making changes to the content—and then it told me what buyers would be interested in." And when Baily tasked the tech with producing a list of production and distribution companies that might invest, ScriptSense obliged.

He also sees lots of promise in concepting and image-generation tools (which can be useful for accelerating the visual development process) and others that generate adaptable data. One example is Anything World, a 3D animation and rigging platform that allows users to upload a model and generate things like walk- or run-cycle data. "It's not creating a finished, lit shot; it's creating data you can interact with," Baily notes.

The real potential comes when individual AI systems can be plugged into each other to create specialized networks, says Blue Zoo's Box, adding that while the tech is not quite there yet, producers need to be ready for that eventuality.

"We're being very open-minded about where it's all likely to go. Consider a time in the future when one person could make their own animation series. We're trying to really look at what that means for us—not by trying to make an animation series just by pressing one button, but by being a little bit more intelligent about it in terms of what our strengths are when it comes to human storytelling.

"As an animation studio, we have to be ahead of the curve, which is why we're really trying to push as much as we can and find out what these tools can do." k

el reino infantil

#1 SPANISH KID´S NETWORK WORLDWIDE!

+250M SUBSCRIBERS!

contact us - ylka.tapia@puro.studio

Visit: partners.elreinoinfantil.com

A treatise on treaties

As the commissioning slowdown continues to disrupt kids content financing, producers are increasingly considering official treaty co-productions and the benefits they unlock to help close larger financing gaps. But navigating this arcane, and sometimes archaic, space is not for the faint of heart.

BY: JEREMY DICKSON

Getting a kids TV series or movie project certified as an official treaty co-production is becoming more valuable as the industry continues to grapple with high production costs, shrinking budgets and fewer commissioning opportunities.

With the power to unlock unique funding benefits—including broadcast license fees and top-tier tax credits in each participating country—treaty status is more important than ever, and the proof is evident.

Canada's Shaw Rocket Fund—the largest private funder of independent Canadian kids content—fielded 16 applications for potential treaty co-productions in 2023/2024, compared to just one in 2022/2023, three in 2021/2022 and four in 2020/2021.

"This uptick shows there's a need for different ways to finance," notes president and CEO Agnes Augustin. "We're also seeing a lot of production companies that are able to fund and produce projects on their own now seeking treaty co-pro partners for the first time because of the state of the industry."

For instance, Canadian public broadcasters TVOKids, Société Radio-Canada and Knowledge Network, along with ABC Australia, are backing a new co-pro called *Flower and Flour* from Toronto's Sinking Ship Entertainment and Aussie studio Cheeky Little Media (*Kangaroo Beach*).

With additional funding from Screen Australia, the Canada Media Fund, Shaw Rocket Fund and Screen NSW, this 39 x seven-minute CG-animated series is the first treaty co-production that 12-year-old Cheeky has ever worked on, and it's also Sinking Ship's first co-pro with an Australian partner.

Sinking Ship leveraged the Canada-Belgium treaty for its live-action series *Beyond Black Beauty*, a co-pro with Brussels-based Saga Film

Financing firsts

Cheeky has come close to doing treaty co-pros with France, Canada and the UK over the years, but in the end, it always found ways to finance its shows more domestically—relying on Australia's tax credit and, in some cases, funding from Screen Australia, plus license fees (primarily from the ABC) and usually one other international partner (typically an distributor), says co-founder Patrick Egerton.

"For *Kangaroo Beach*, *Vegesaurs*, *Kazoops!* and *Bottersnikes and Gumbles*, that was always enough to close out the financing," says Egerton. "We've also tended to work with studios in Asia for the animation production component, and sometimes those studios tapped into a local offset. But none of those models have necessitated a treaty co-production."

The difference with *Flower and Flour* was that Cheeky had a large financing gap to fill, so it was necessary to explore another funding option, according to Egerton. The idea to do a treaty co-pro with Canada came about because he knew that Canadian broadcasters were already interested in the show, and he had always wanted to work with Sinking Ship.

"The crucial thing, from a funding perspective, is that as a treaty co-pro, the series officially became Canadian content, which unlocked not only the license fees from broadcasters, but also the top tier of Canadian tax credits and CMF funding," says Egerton. "Getting treaty status really boosted the amount of funding coming out of Canada."

But treaty co-pros often get tricky because the proportion of spend by each co-producer must roughly equal the percentage of creative points in each territory for key roles.

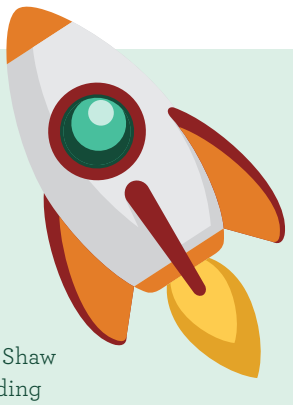
Alignments and misalignments

This structure is challenging because the screen industry bodies in each country take a different approach to categorizing the creative points, according to Egerton.

"Screen Australia's system, for example, has a total of 13 points spread across very broad categories, so it's more generic," he explains. "[On the other hand], Telefilm Canada's points grid works on smaller percentages apportioned across a much more granular and detailed set of categories covering individual animation production roles, so it's more specific." (A Crown corporation that supports the Canadian audiovisual industry, Telefilm is responsible for evaluating and recommending projects that may be recognized by the Department of Canadian Heritage as audiovisual treaty co-productions.)

The point values that each system applies to specific spend items are also different, Egerton adds. For example, Screen Australia more loosely awards 22% of the total points towards cast, whereas Telefilm awards 8% to principal cast and another 6% to principal cast for the dubbed version (either French or English).

"Because the grids never correspond simply, co-producers have to collaborate strategically and creatively on how they split the creative points to satisfy the co-pro criteria of their respective screen bodies," he says. "It's all doable, but there's a degree of jockeying needed on both sides. That's why it's really important to have a good, transparent relationship with your co-producer, where you're both working openly and collaboratively towards finding an equitable split that makes sense for both partners."



ROCKET SCIENCE

Shaw Rocket Fund by the numbers.

Last year, submissions to Shaw Rocket Fund's three funding programs consisted of six majority-Canadian productions and 10 for which the majority of the production budget is covered by other countries, says president and CEO Agnes Augustin.

Among the applications to the fund's content creation program (for all content excluding feature films) were two majority-Belgian co-pros, three Canada-New Zealand co-pros (two of which are majority-Canadian), a majority-Icelandic project (74%), a majority-French project (64%), an equally budgeted Canada-Australia co-pro, a majority-Australian/Singaporean project, and a Canada-UK co-pro with a 62%/38% budget split.

The Rocket Fund's joint-venture with public/private financier Canada Media Fund, which supports digital-first animated kids series, received three co-pro applications from a Canada-Ireland project (80%/20%), a Canada-Greece project (70%/30%) and a France-Canada project (61%/39%).

And the remaining three submissions were for feature films: two Canada-France co-pros (one equally budgeted, and one an 86%/14% split); and one from Ireland-Canada (81%/19%). —Jeremy Dickson

Kate O'Connor, executive chair of trade body Animation UK, concurs. "Co-pro partnerships are sometimes complex, and in animation, these are long-term relationships. You have to work hard at them and be clear with each other."

Another issue that sometimes crops up involves certain key roles being excluded from a treaty. For example, the role of CG supervisor doesn't exist in the Australian or Canadian points systems—a good indicator that they are out of date, says Carla de Jong, Sinking Ship's head of co-production and international partnerships.

"Given how important this role is in a CG-animated series, its exclusion feels like a bit of an oversight," says de Jong. "There are also a lot of roles on creative grids that we just leave blank because they don't really exist anymore in the way that animation is made."

Keeping up with the industry

While de Jong allows that it takes time to modernize co-pro treaties, she's encouraged by several efforts on this front that are currently underway. For example, the South Korea-Canada co-production treaty is currently under review, and the New Zealand-Canada treaty

was recently modernized to be more flexible (which could explain why Shaw Rocket Fund saw an uptick in these applications this year—see sidebar on previous page for more details).

Broadcasters have also taken notice. For instance, Canada's Family Channel, TVNZ in New Zealand and ABC Australia recently commissioned *Badjelly*, a 2D-animated series from Canadian studio Sphere Animation, New Zealand's Mukpuddy Animation and Ireland's Cantilever Media. *Badjelly* is the first-ever kids animation treaty co-production between New Zealand, Canada and the UK, according to the show's producers.

The Canada-Belgium treaty is another very workable one that Sinking Ship leveraged for its live-action series *Beyond Black Beauty*, a co-pro with Brussels-based Saga Film that sold to WildBrain's Family Channel and RTL Netherlands last year. And de Jong says Sinking Ship is also working with a Belgian company on an unannounced animated film that's expected to be produced under the same treaty.

As a treaty co-pro between Toronto's Sinking Ship and Australian studio Cheeky Little Media, *Flower and Flour* unlocked Canadian licensing fees, tax credits and funding

***Odd Squad UK* is a treaty co-production between Sinking Ship and BBC Studios Kids & Family, in association with CBBC, PBS KIDS, TVOKids and Société Radio-Canada**

In addition to updating its treaty with New Zealand, the Canadian government has also modernized its agreements with Belgium, China, India, Ireland, Jordan, Luxembourg and Ukraine since 2014.

With a longstanding treaty history, Canada currently has almost 60 partner countries, and continues to be a leader in co-productions. That's fantastic, but Augustin would like to see the modernization process speed up, and there's also work to do when it comes to building awareness among producers about the new-and-improved efficiencies of the treaties once they're updated.

"It's great that we have nearly 60 [treaties], and some of them are working well," she says. "But many still need to be modernized, and quite a few aren't being used at all, or they only focus on certain types of mediums." Augustin adds, "The treaties also need to be updated to acknowledge streaming platforms and digital-first kids content in order to unlock support for those types of projects."

Augustin is in early conversations with the Canadian Media Producers Association and others to work with Telefilm Canada and the governments of Canada's partner countries to prioritize and expedite treaty updates.

"It's really difficult to finance shows in Canada—especially children's series right now—so how do we make financing more efficient so it's not taking two to five years? It can't work like that," she says.

Navigation support

Looking to help in other ways, Shaw Rocket Fund is also actively asking what producers are doing to get treaty-certified and then helping to align budgets. "Our role isn't to work with them directly on accessing the treaty with Telefilm; our role is as an investor and partner," explains Augustin. "As for the creative talent split, we leave that with the producers to work out with their creative partners. We don't want to make it more complicated."

Egerton's advice for producers who have never gone the treaty co-pro route is to find an experienced partner or enlist third-party support. "A treaty co-production would be very hard to do with two producers who have never done a co-pro before, or never looked at a treaty," he says. "If it's their first rodeo, I think it would be pretty tough, and some form of consultancy on both sides would be a good idea."

The first step is to read the treaty thoroughly and then go to the government org with questions, adds Sinking Ship's de Jong. "We find Telefilm to be extremely responsive and helpful with the myriad questions we always have whenever we go into a new treaty."

Egerton agrees: "Whether it's Telefilm, Screen Australia or the British Film Institute, the screen authorities are motivated to help producers make the model work, but producers themselves have to do the work to make sure they meet the criteria."

Animation UK's O'Connor puts it even more bluntly: "The complexity of a producer's life right now in terms of navigating co-pros is insane. Though we represent fairly established producers, navigating treaties is always one of our most requested session topics. And we're definitely seeing an increase in people from the business who have done co-pros offering consultancy now."

TAIWAN ANIMATION

FEB. 9th–12th
@ kidscreen Summit
February 9 to 12, 2025 • Marriott Marquis San Diego

Discover Asia's Rising Talents of Kids Animation

Chickie Small's Cafe
Happy Chips Co. Ltd.

Crazy Night Market
Xanthus Animation Studio

Deer May
Mangowork Studio Co., Ltd.

FIFI & BOBO
PIGGY FLIGHT FILMS

Hide and Seek
Chimney Animation

Polar Land
DINODUCX Studio

TAKOKUMA'S ADVENTURE STORY
Sunthingood Co., Ltd.

TAIWAN SPOTLIGHT Pitching

FEB. 10th (Mon.) 11:30am Pacific 15, Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina

TAICCA TAIWAN CREATIVE CONTENT AGENCY

Sinking Ship teamed up with the Jane Goodall Institute for its eco-educational adventure co-pro *Jane*

Mission possible

Building a series with like-minded charitable partners is one way to get more content off the ground in a risk-averse market—and it also feels pretty good.

BY: SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN

As the industry continues to grapple with a commissioning downturn, the search for new content financing strategies is on. And mission-based projects could be poised for growth as one way to weather the storm.

The business model of partnering with charities or advocacy groups to develop kids TV concepts that align with their missions has really started to take off lately.

Toronto's Sinking Ship Entertainment, which has been producing cause-oriented shows for two decades now, had one of its biggest hits in this space with *Jane*—an eco-themed co-pro with the Jane Goodall Institute that dropped a second season on Apple TV+ in April 2023. And it's currently developing another series concept with The Planetary Society and Bill Nye.

Similarly, Cottonwood Media's seven-year partnership with the Opéra National de Paris has led to cost savings and greater authenticity for three shows and counting. And then there's the Future

Chicken franchise, a transmedia collaboration that was conceived by Vancouver-based Wind Sun Sky Entertainment and Annabel Slaight's charity group ClearWater Farm.

Recognizing that there's something of a white space developing here now, the experienced producers behind these success stories have generously shared some of the tips and best practices they've gleaned from forging a path into mission-based content for kids.

Strategic outreach

Roll Play (2006 to 2012) was one of Sinking Ship's first mission-based projects, and the studio wanted to make sure it was developing a knowledge-based foundation—especially since the show dealt with health and encouraging physical activity among kids. So Sinking Ship founding partner J. J. Johnson brought in the Heart and Stroke Foundation to provide this expertise. He notes that sometimes an organization can start out as a consultant or discoverability partner before evolving into a co-producer at a later stage.

But simply having an expert external resource attached sends a good message to buyers. "If we can convince [the org] to join us on this creative journey, it's already answered for the network that we've got someone who can speak with authority on a subject," Johnson explains, adding that producers still have to pitch mission-based concepts cleverly in order to eradicate any lingering hesitation. One way is to include specific examples of how a series will get kids excited about a real-world issue while still delivering educational value.

But first and foremost, how does one bring a partner on board? It's worth casting a wide net to see if a co-production partnership would appeal to any prominent nonprofit orgs—especially since the result might be surprising. Johnson was astonished when he discovered that his company was the first to pitch a kids series to the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI). "They were wildly open to [co-producing] because it wasn't something they were hearing every day," he recalls.

And sometimes this conversation can start the other way around—as it did in the case of *Future Chicken*. The premise of a chicken who travels through time to report on the long-term impact of today's eco-friendly actions actually originated at a 2022 workshop hosted by ClearWater Farm, where kids spoke candidly about feeling hopeless under the weight of eco-anxiety. They brainstormed a rough idea for an optimistic bird that brings back good news from the future, recalls Wind Sun Sky CEO Catherine Winder, who later came on board to co-create the now-sprawling franchise with Slaight.

The key to encouraging more active outreach from nonprofits is building a track record in the mission-based subgenre and showing that your studio understands how to amplify a good cause, says Johnson. For example, Global Citizen contacted Sinking Ship in 2023 to see if there was an opportunity to partner on something that would reach a younger audience than it had typically targeted.

The group's ethos of "wanting to create better citizens" aligned perfectly with a concept called *Media Stamped* that TV writer and host Nicole Stamp pitched to Sinking Ship, so Global Citizen quickly jumped on board to executive produce this four x 11-minute tween series about media literacy.

Continuing this trend, space advocacy org The Planetary Society recently got in touch with the Canadian prodco after noting its success with *Jane*. "They reached out to us [wanting] to get kids and families excited about space—which, as a sci-fi nerd, was music to my ears," says Johnson, adding that the partners are now in early development on a series concept called *Spaceships*.

Based on the missions of Jane Goodall, each episode of *Jane* focuses on a different endangered species

Olivia Levenson Korchagin, co-founder of New York-based Global Tinker (best known for producing STEAM-focused animated series *The Paper Girls Show*), recommends mapping out networking opportunities in the fields of academia, research, advocacy groups and community services. For example, a climate-related IP might scour the exhibitor list of Emerson Collective's Climate Science Fair. And for a series concept tied to engineering, a producer could research what local universities are doing in terms of K-12 STEM research and programming.

"Many of these organizations are eager for fresh approaches that amplify their work," says Korchagin. "And in exchange, you can weave research-backed, mission-driven initiatives into the fabric of your concept."

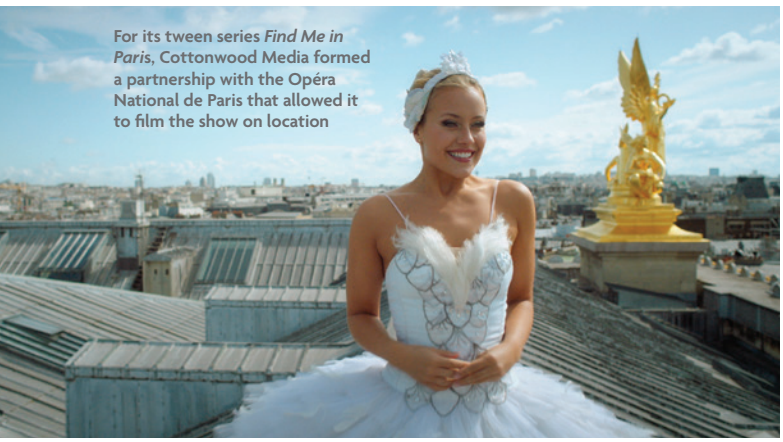
As an alternative to orgs co-producing, Korchagin takes a different approach. "We don't take funding from grassroots organizations. Instead, we collaborate with them to attract support and financing from all walks of life who are passionate about [inspiring solutions to specific causes]," she explains.

Two-way benefits

Mission-based content can get a major discoverability boost from partner charities that are well-versed in knowing how to harness and energize their network, says Johnson. For example, having an environmental juggernaut like the Jane Goodall Institute on board with *Jane* helped ramp up marketing efforts and lock down unique deals, including a touring museum experience to promote the series. *Jane's Endangered Animal Experience* is currently running in Toronto after hitting LA and Pittsburgh in 2023, and Johnson teases early plans for a European stop in the near future.

A charitable org can also bring deeper knowledge and more nuance into the DNA of a show, even offering creative notes through uniquely focused eyes, he adds. With *Jane*, JGI was initially focused on evaluating what the series would say about various animals. But eventually, Goodall herself shared creative feedback, suggesting that the protagonist's mother make a conscious shift to a more supportive attitude towards her daughter's passion for wildlife and nature. "It was such a great note, and we made that switch where you could see Jane's mom slowly start to realize how important all of this is to her daughter."

Looking to reach a younger demo, Global Citizen executive produced Sinking Ship's *Media Stamped*, a tween-targeted media literacy show



For its tween series *Find Me in Paris*, Cottonwood Media formed a partnership with the Opéra National de Paris that allowed it to film the show on location

Nonprofit partners can provide more tangible resources to boost the content, too. In 2017, for example, ZDF suggested one condition to greenlighting Cottonwood Media's live-action dance series *Find Me In Paris*—filming it at the Opéra National de Paris, recalls the prodco's president David Michel. But since paying for this would cost hundreds of thousands of euros a day, Michel decided instead to try approaching the opera company with a partnership proposal.

What began as a challenge turned into a boon for the series as the Opéra readily agreed to come on board as a co-producer in a bid to engage Gen Alpha and give its ballet school more visibility. "For them, the show was a way to [spotlight] the school because a lot of people know about the ballet house and the prima ballerinas—but not so much about the school itself, which trains kids to become professional dancers," says Michel.

Having the Opéra provide the sets for the show was valued as its co-production share, he adds, estimating that the deal resulted in a 20% cost saving. "And once the actors were cast, they actually spent three months in intensive training with the [Opéra] choreographers," injecting the show with a premium quality that helped it lock down early presales to ABC Australia, Disney Channel France/Italy, France Télévisions and Belgium's VRT before filming began in summer 2017.

Establishing a rapport through this co-pro deal, the Opéra has continued working with Cottonwood over the years—providing a location once again for sequel series *Spellbound*, and consulting on the prodco's next CG-animated *20 Dance Street* (26 x 26 minutes). This upcoming toon for six to 11s will feature motion-capture dance sequences created by real dancers in the Opéra's corps de ballet.

Rapport-building takes time, but speed to market is a key to success in the mission-based content genre. For Winder, today's heightened climate anxiety made it imperative to fast-track the development and launch of Future Chicken, instead of going the traditional route of a more gradual build and shopping for financing before moving forward—a process that can take between three to five years to deliver a completed show. "We wanted to be in the market in a year or two," she notes.

ClearWater Farm helped make this happen by connecting Winder's team with a foundation that provided seed funding to develop a multi-platform roadmap for Future Chicken, including a collection of digital shorts, a website, a podcast, a mixed-media series (*The Future Chicken Today Show*) and a Roblox mini-game. The Future Chicken team was able to raise US$7 million (CAD$10 million), with a "significant portion" contributed by its nonprofit partner, says Winder.

And she adds that having a nonprofit on board has also opened doors to more cause-oriented partnerships, including one with Kids Help Phone (an org that provides youth counselling online or over the phone). "We are creating content for their channels that is tailored around climate anxiety."

Entertainment value

Both Winder and Johnson say mental health represents a major opportunity in the mission-based content space. "Part of the reason why I think kids 'watch up' so much now is because [it's only] older content that's dealing with these things," Johnson theorizes, calling for more teen shows to follow Degrassi's classic formula of tackling coming-of-age struggles without getting too edgy or mature.

Despite seeming abundant, environmental content may also have room to grow. Johnson senses that audiences are craving more sophisticated eco-storytelling beyond familiar tropes and mantras like reduce-reuse-recycle.

Nonetheless, while Gen Alpha is known for social consciousness, mission-based storytelling can't bank on cause alone. There's still the need for a strong entertainment hook to pique the interest of young viewers—many of whom are also rethinking how much real-world heaviness they can digest in their content.

The latest edition of UCLA's annual *Teens and Screens* report (October 2024) showed a significant growth in demand for fantasy content, which is preferred by 50% of pre-teens and 34.5% of teens compared to other subjects (including stories about issues that impact society). Study co-author Yalda Uhls associated this trend with "crisis fatigue," since these kids' formative years were marked by stressors such as the pandemic and the 24-hour news cycle.

Johnson reiterates that a social message must be folded inside a compelling story to ensure young audiences don't feel preached at. "*Jane* is meant to get kids thinking about the environment, but it's also an action series about a kid who uses her imagination to go on insane adventures while saving animals. She's driving vehicles through the Tundra, she's exploring underwater in submarines—but if you distill all that down, you'll find the message."

Great characters lead the way in bringing entertainment value to cause-based content, Korchagin emphasizes. It's not an easy balance to hit, but beacons like *Sesame Street* and PBS are proof that it can happen, she adds. k

KOOKOO WORLD'S FRIENDS

25 x 3'

Vicky, Jere, Dae and ABC share moments of learning, curiosity and happiness, with a strong focus on inclusion, respect and values.

the ADVENTURES OF Dae

15 x 3'

Our bravest friend introduces us to fun adventures ranging from science, technology and music to art, travel and many new challenges.

Available in Latin American Spanish, English, Portuguese, French and Arabic.

Get in touch! **sales@renxo.com**

© 2025 Renxo Europe Limited

COOL NEW SHOWS

KIDSCREEN SUMMIT EDITION

BY: RYAN TUCHOW & SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN

Last year was immensely challenging for the kids media industry, but a new year means new opportunities, new partnerships and new show concepts, including these buzzy ones that are heading to Kidscreen Summit 2025.

6 to 9

Drama Queen

Producer: Squeeze Animation Studios (Canada)
Format: 52 x seven minutes
Style: CG animation
Budget: US$9 million
Status: Visual research, a series bible and a first script are completed, along with several episode synopses. Squeeze is now focused on financing and distribution.
Delivery: Q2 2027

Living as royalty in a video-game fantasy world, Cherry-Lou is a spoiled brat who expects everything to be handed to her. But when she presses the restart button on her life, she ends up with nothing and must learn how to do things for herself and form actual friendships. In one episode, tired of waiting in a border checkpoint line, Cherry-Lou reverts to type and looks for a way to cheat her way closer to the front. But later, when a clumsy warrior appears, rather than do battle, she opts to wait for rain to weigh down his heavy armor so she can defeat him more easily—showing that she's learned the value of patience. *Drama Queen*'s animation team has built up an abundance of experience on Squeeze's flagship original series *Crackè*, which has aired in more than 210 countries and territories.

Battalor

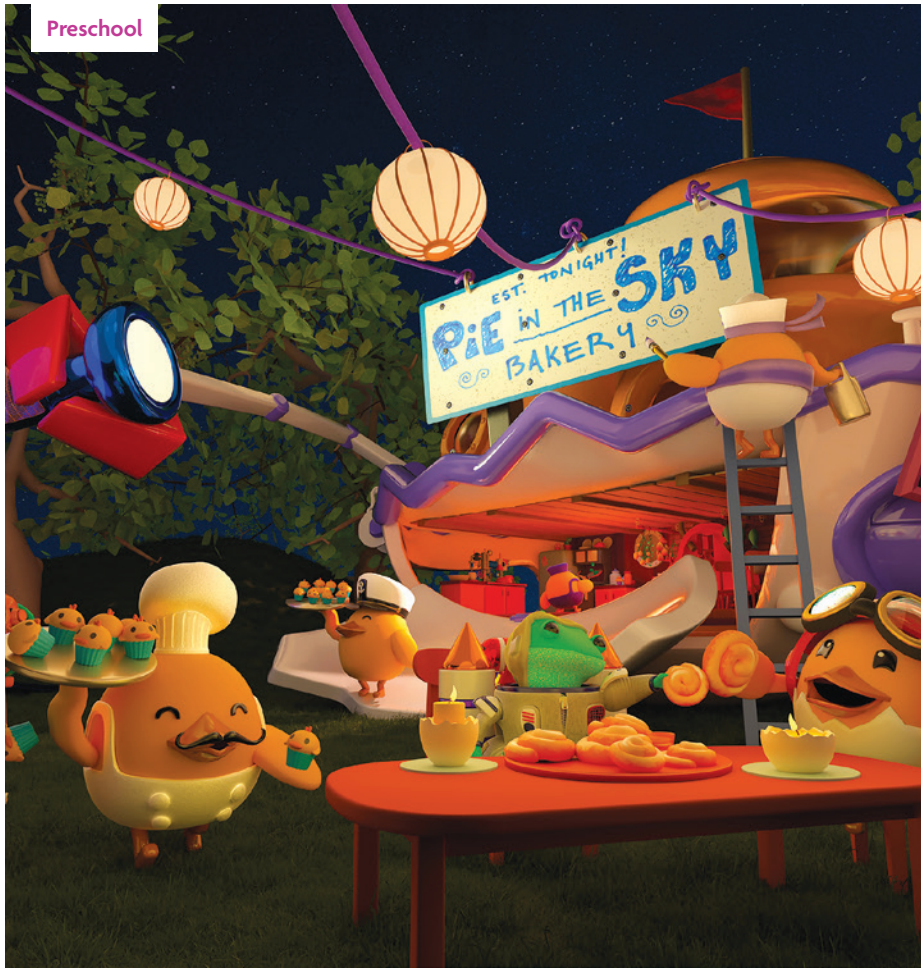
Co-producers: Jellyfish Originals (UK), Toikido (UK)
Format: 10 x 22 minutes (working format)
Style: CG animation
Budget: US$7.5 million
Status: A bible and pilot script are ready, and the team is looking for commissioning broadcasters and distributors, with Jellyfish managing global rights for now.
Delivery: 18 months after greenlight

Futuristic settings, unlikely heroes and a toyetic foundation are just a few of the ingredients setting up *Battalor* to stand out in the market. Emmy-nominated writer Jordan Gershowitz (*Hot Wheels Let's Race*) is attached to this action-packed concept about ancient, high-powered devices (a.k.a. Battalors) that channel powers from mythical animal beasts. A group of kids must learn to unlock and master these powers after their city is invaded by an evil force determined to reassemble the legendary Black Battalor and unleash its dark powers. Toikido—which heads up global licensing and gaming development for the IP—is planning a 2026 Battalor toy launch.

The Hare of High Park

Producer: Little Engine Moving Pictures (Canada)
Format: 52 x 5.5 minutes or 26 x 11 minutes
Budget: US$2.5 million
Style: Mixed media, with CG-animated animal characters and real human characters and backgrounds.
Status: A bible and several animatics are available. Little Engine is talking to potential broadcasters and co-producers.
Delivery: Q2 2026

Little Engine's Maria Kennedy and Ben Mazzotta optioned this cozy, wind-down series from creators Tarun Padmakumar (an animator at Ubisoft) and Joanna Fishbein (a designer at BioWare). The concept—featuring a hare with a talent for finding lost items and returning them to their owners—was inspired by quiet walks through Toronto's High Park that lifted the pair out of their loneliness during the pandemic. The concept won last year's PITCH This! competition at the Ottawa International Animation Festival, where a jury of kids media executives praised its peaceful and calming vibe.



Preschool

Duncan's Flying Tugboat

Co-producers: CUDO (US) and Relish Studios (Canada)
Format: 26 x five minutes
Style: CG animation
Budget: US$2 million
Status: Both studios are hunting for broadcasters, distributors and financial support.
Delivery: Q2 2026

In this adventure-comedy short series, a crew of eggs goes on rescue missions in a magical flying tugboat. Storylines see them pulling a broken-down rocket over the finish line to win a race, or in a different sort of rescue, turning the tugboat into a bakery to save a birthday party that has run out of snacks. Penning the scripts is *PAW Patrol* writer Scott Albert, who's aiming to find the right balance between the exciting action of rescue shows and the humbling emotion of helping people in need. Singer Jason Paige (*Pokémon*) and TikTok musician Sunglasses Kid (286,000 followers) are working on a theme song, and Relish (*Barbie's Dreamworld, Polly Pocket & Friends*) will handle the animation.

Ru at Red River

Co-producers: Big Bad Boo (Canada) and GAPC (Canada)
Format: 26 x 11 minutes
Style: 2D animation
Budget: US$3.8 million
Status: Currently in development with CBC Kids, with two scripts and a pitch bible available. Next up on Big Bad Boo's to-do list is attracting international broadcasters, producers, distributors and investors.
Delivery: Q3 2026

In the friendly community of Red River, a duck named Fergus and several young woodland creatures with visible and invisible disabilities learn to navigate the world, helping each other along the way. The cast includes Ru (a raccoon with anxiety), Silas (a turtle with mobility issues) and Mika (a visually impaired bunny). In one episode, the critters are excited to go to Red River's new bake shop, which has stairs that are a challenge for Silas. So they decide to make a ramp so they can all go in for cupcakes. This fun take on representing disabilities is the brainchild of Celeste Koon, who has written for Sesame Workshop, TVOKids and CBC Kids.

Preschool

FLIP THE SCRIPT

Chart your path at the world's most inspiring entertainment industry event

BANFF
WORLD MEDIA FESTIVAL
JUNE 8-11, 2025

REGISTER NOW
banffmediafestival.com

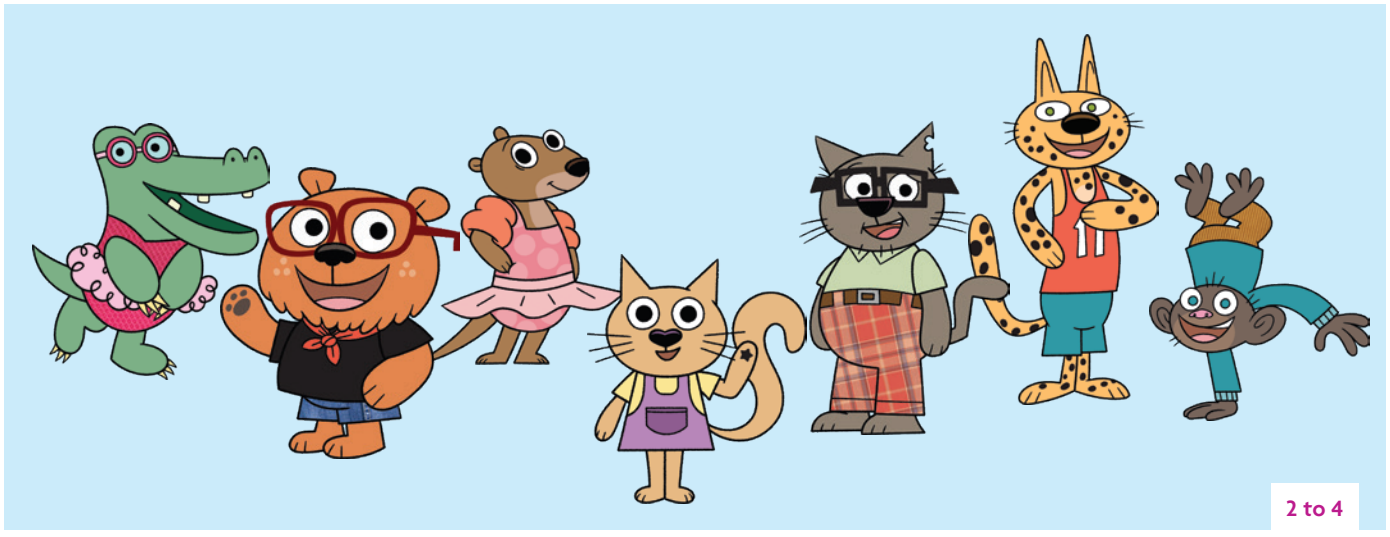
Partnership opportunities:
kejem@brunico.com

Groups and delegations:
bboudreau@brunico.com

Triple Travis

Producer: Cosmic Animation (Costa Rica)
Format: 52 x five minutes
Style: 2D animation
Budget: US$1.5 million to US$2 million
Status: A 30-second teaser, pilot script and short bible are available.
Delivery: 12 to 18 months after greenlight

What if all the facets of your personality turned into actual people who look just like you? That's the chaotic set-up for this comedy-driven sci-fi concept from New York Times bestselling book illustrator and animator Leo Trinidad, whose kids TV credits include *Ivick Von Salza* and *Kip Van Creepy*. A shy young genius named Travis creates a machine that spits out two "clone" brothers he starts calling on to sub in for him in overwhelming situations. But what seems like a quick fix inevitably leads to mayhem. In one ep, Travis is too tired to do track laps at school, so he gets his more athletic duplicate to run in his place—but when the clone sprints a little too fast, he accidentally creates a demonic tornado that wreaks havoc on the school. No matter what arises, every episode ends with Travis learning to face his fears and find a solution (which, in this instance, is to run in the opposite direction to reverse the tornado).



Cat the Cat Tries That!

Producer: Hidden Pigeon Company (US)
Style: 2D animation with CG elements
Format: 39 x seven minutes
Budget: US$300,000 to US$400,000 per half hour
Status: A bible, one-sheet, three scripts and concept art are available. Hidden Pigeon is looking for a broadcast partner.
Delivery: Q3/Q4 2027

Building from Mo Willems' New York Times bestselling Cat the Cat book series (which spans eight titles), Hidden Pigeon's latest series revolves around a preschool-aged cat who loves to try new things. And even when she dislikes something, she finds a way to make discovering this with her friends a fun experience. Each episode includes two three-minute stories and a one-minute musical interstitial that juxtaposes familiar animal sounds (like a duck quacking) with fantastical ones (like a cheetah chirping). Expect a good-time take on encouraging kids to get out of their comfort zone and embrace the thrill of discovery.

DETECTIVE
FINNICK
NEW IP
ANIMOTION
animotion.media
sales@animotion.media

BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

"From the mundane comes the ridiculous in Wallace & Gromit's world," says Aardman's Merlin Crossingham—whether it's flying to the moon in search of cheese, or defeating a diamond-stealing penguin

Gromit the underdog

Wallace and Gromit's second feature-length film, *Vengeance Most Fowl,* debuted with 4.6 million views on Netflix in January, proving the timelessness of Aardman's 35-year-old franchise about an eccentric inventor and his brainy beagle. But the canine half of this duo may have looked a whole lot different if creator Nick Park hadn't come up with some clever solutions to a few claymation hiccups.

When he initially created the characters from plasticine modeling clay in 1982 as part of a graduation project, Park envisioned Gromit as a cat. "He found that [feline form] was quite hard to make from modeling clay, but a dog was much easier to sculpt," says Merlin Crossingham, an Aardman veteran who has worked on multiple Wallace & Gromit projects and co-directed the new film, too.

Early concept art also depicted the characteristically quiet pooch with lips, since he was originally supposed to speak. But Park found that he was unable to properly animate Gromit's mouth, so he ultimately left it out. And thus, those expressive eyes that speak louder than words came into being. "Nick realized that the power of Gromit not speaking was far stronger than him actually having a voice," says Crossingham.

In 1985, Aardman—one of just a handful of stop-motion studios in operation at the time—offered to work with Park to complete his project, which premiered in 1989 as the Oscar-nominated short film, *A Grand Day Out*.

Being voiceless (and often misunderstood) made Gromit a literal underdog—but a highly relatable one. And Crossingham cites this relatability as one of the many reasons for the brand's multi-generational appeal, along with the British charm and inventive antics of its lovable lead characters.

—Sadhana Bharanidharan

Currently comprising four short films and two feature-length projects, the Wallace & Gromit IP also spawned hit spinoff brand Shaun the Sheep

Wallace had a mustache in Park's original sketches, while the now-anthropomorphic Gromit was first conceptualized as a regular dog walking on all fours, with a wide toothy grin

HARi
The WEASY family
78 x 7'
DELIVERY 2025!

Bidaya
Media
THE ADVENTURES OF
Mansour
AGE OF A.I.
52 x 11'
AVAILABLE
Epic Story Media
Distribution:
jessica.labi@epicstorymedia.com
ken.faier@epicstorymedia.com
Licensing:
david.sztoser@epicstorymedia.com
Bidaya FZ LLC Under License © 2025 All Rights Reserved